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CAVALRY LIFE

OR

SKETCHES AND STORIES

IN BARRACKS AND OUT

By J. S. WINTER



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1881.

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P R E F A C E.

18 Mar. 54. Clark
I HAVE received orders from my publishers to write a Preface to the collection of sketches now to be offered to the public.

A Preface! What an order! I would as soon write another volume; it certainly would be the easier task of the twain. It has to be done, of course; but how, I don't know. I never wrote a Preface in my life. I have not the least idea how to set about it; though I am in an utter agony of apprehension, lest defects in this absolute necessity should "mull" the effect of the whole.

I have consulted a friend on the subject, who says: "Pooh! if you can write a book full of sketches, you can write a Preface;" and he says it as glibly as if it is nothing more difficult than an acceptance of a dinner invitation, and can be dashed off at a moment's notice.

I explain to him that “a book full of sketches” is an easy matter. I simply take a real soldier out of a real regiment, and give him somebody else’s real name; I put real jokes into his mouth, and relate real incidents which happened to him or to somebody else. But I cannot do that with a Preface; where shall I find a Preface in real life?

My friend assumes a serious aspect; and, leaving the question of the Preface altogether, remarks that, in his opinion, I am playing a dangerous game.

“Supposing,” says he, wisely, “supposing any fellow recognizes his own portrait.”

I know that “any fellow” is much more likely to recognize some “other fellow’s” portrait than his own; though, goodness knows, they are nearly all unvarnished enough for the most obtuse self-blindness to see clearly through the thin disguise cast over them.

Mais rereurons à nos moutons—otherwise our Preface! I fear all this is terribly out of order; yet there are one or two things I should like to say, whether they are out of order or not.

I wish the sketches to be taken strictly for what they are—*portraits from life* of our British-born sons of Mars. I own frankly that characters and incidents are, for the most part, real characters and incidents, slightly shuffled and embroidered; and that *all* have a foundation of truth.

The old letters introduced into “His Princess” (date 1759-1761) are simply copies of the originals. I certainly did mend up the spelling and the punctuation a bit—both were vile; for, finding it such a nuisance to wade through them myself, I feared my readers would never trouble to look at them, unless I *translated* them into plainer English.

And thus I launch my military children (not quite of fancy) upon the world; dedicating the portraits to the originals—to all the gentlemen who have been unconsciously my models, I make my bow, and sign myself the thereby greatly obliged

AUTHOR!

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CAVALRY LIFE.



REGIMENTAL LIFE.

VERY few people have any conception of how severe a school the Army is. I speak more especially of the mounted branch of the service, because popular writers of fiction are more fond of “writing up” cavalry officers than any other.

One has grown intimately acquainted with life in the mess-room, as so many authors depict it. One has learned all the names officers are popularly supposed to bestow upon one another. There is always a colonel, old, white-haired, and singularly amiable, who is a sort of protecting father to all his officers. He looks after their love-affairs, of which, by-the-bye, in real life, a chief is supposed to remain in blissful ignorance. He sees they are not “put upon” by their seniors; is frequently spoken to as “old fellow,” and very often falls in love with the young lady who has gained the affections of one of his “subs.” of, say, six weeks’ standing.

Then comes the major; generally a woman-hater this. Why a major should invariably hold the fair sex in detestation is not often explained; but there the truth is, stern and unvarnished, and the reader has to make the best of it. Sometimes this woman-hater falls in love, and is transformed into a husband of the most exemplary description, but more often he remains in his unpleasant character to the end of the chapter.

I wonder does it never occur to the writer that, in the natural course of events, a man fond of soldiering, who sticks to it, must get promotion? In that case, does the major take up his predecessor's paternal line of action, and was the typical chief a woman-hater also, before he obtained his regiment?

Amongst the captains there are various characters; there is one who can do anything or everything. He can sing, hunt, fish, ride—he can win a steeple-chase on the veriest serew, by virtue of his brilliant riding; he can shoot, draw, and paint, act, dance, and do everything under the sun with equal perfection. He is one of those whom the gods love, and he does not die young. He is like the princess in the fairy tale, who was fortunate enough to have three fairy godmothers, for every luxury and blessing seems to have been showered down upon him. He is singularly handsome, too—generally of the type which, but for the moustaches, might serve for the face of a young

duchess ; he has more money than he can spend, which, as he is in a cavalry regiment, must be considerable. He has a wonderful constitution too, for he can drink all night—brandy-and-sodas, save the mark ! —and yet he is up with the lark in the morning, at some innocent and healthy pursuit, which, though you might find occupying a schoolboy, never, in this world, induced an officer, after a night of unlimited brandy-and-soda, to turn out of his comfortable bed until the very last moment. And the most wonderful of all is that, in spite of these excesses, our hero's eyes never lose their brightness or their clearness ; his hand and aim are invariably as steady as a rock.

To finish the list of this gentleman's charms, he is an accomplished flirt ; his very name is a terror to mothers and husbands, and yet he usually ends by marrying some insipid unformed child just out of the schoolroom, and, like the married major, settles down into a steady-going country squire, without a wish or an idea beyond his childish wife, his hunting, and his short-horns ; in fact, he sinks into a state of bucolic stupidity, and altogether forgets the days when he was the boast—very frequently the toast—of “ours,” and was known far and wide as “Beauty” so-and-so.

Then there is another captain who smokes. Of him we do not see very much ; his life, his thoughts, his

conversation, and his character may be summed up in the single word *smoke* ; and so very properly his existence, for us, is but hazy.

The senior subaltern and his duties are utterly ignored ; and most prominent of all these military children of fancy is the young cornet. He is very young, this wonderful boy, and he has a decided tendency to go wrong ; but every one pets him and makes much of him, and he is popularly known as "Baby" or "Prettyface," sometimes as "the Cherub" or "the Seraph." For this youth the protecting friendliness of the fatherly colonel comes into play, and it is wonderful how many duties and infringements he is excused. He, like our friend the popular captain, is fair to look upon, being of the duchess type, graceful in bearing, and dainty in coloring.

Lastly, we have the regimental surgeon, whom we must one and all own a perfect monstrosity. He is lanky, ugly, ill-dressed, speaks with a strong brogue, or maybe a Tyne-side twang or Northumbrian burr, and altogether excites the curiosity of the reader as to how such a man attained his position.

Sometimes we are admitted into the troop-rooms, and the chief feature we find there is the blind devotion of the men to the officers, or *one* officer in particular ; not only blind devotion, but passionate admiration and keen interest in all their proceedings.

How very, very different is real life in a barrack ! How respectful the “sir” with which the colonel and the major are addressed ! How very different is the behaviour of the junior officers, and how mercilessly severe are the manner and judgments of “the senior sub.” !

The very slightest infringement of regimental rules is visited with an ante-room court-martial ; and the punishments awarded are no mere child’s play ; they are often corporal, and in all cases severe.

In one regiment, which for convenience’ sake we will call the cuirassiers, two subs., lately joined, omitted to rise for early stables, when it was their turn for duty as orderly-officer. The result was, not that these two only were reprimanded ; but that the whole of the subalterns were called into the orderly-room, and, to use their own language, were “jolly well slated.” The two delinquents were not especially mentioned, and thought to hear no more of the matter. Not so. The others simply bided their time until midnight, when, the senior officer having retired, an ante-room court-martial was called, and the defaulters were brought up for trial, and, being convicted, sentenced to punishment. And in what did that punishment consist ? Not in a “slating,” but each was sentenced to receive three strokes of a birch rod from every member of the court-martial ; that is, about thirty strokes each, and *well laid on !*

As soon as a subaltern joins his regiment, he is submitted to a course of practical jokes, ill-treatment, and bullying all round, to which he must offer no resistance, or his career will be a short one. For instance; a few years ago a man named Royd joined this same regiment, and on his first evening amongst his new comrades was "drawn." That is to say, he was visited in his room during the small hours of the morning and ordered to go down into the ante-room for court-martial, the charge against him being that he had risen from the dinner-table whilst an officer senior to him remained sitting. Royd, being of huge stature and gigantic strength, stoutly resisted, and eventually picked up the largest man in the room, carried him out on to the landing, and dropped him over the baluster on to the flagged passage below. The effect was magical ; in an instant all the hubbub was hushed, and the injured man was raised. Fortunately the result was nothing worse than a sprained ankle and a severely-bruised hip. He took it very quietly, and merely looked up at Royd, who was standing near, and said coolly, "I'll have you out for this."

Very possibly the new-comer did not think much of the threat, but his career was virtually over ; at every hour of the day and night did he have cause to repent that hasty action, and during the autumn

manceuvres of that year the climax came. It was in this wise: on a pouring wet day, or rather night, he had to visit the pickets, and as, for some reason, he had no horse, was compelled to do the rounds on foot. On coming in after a tramp of some miles thoroughly soaked and tired out, he was ordered to visit yet another outlying picket six or seven miles away. Then was his tormentor's opportunity; he would not permit him to take a troop horse, though he himself was riding. Tired, cold, and wet, this young subaltern reached the picket; something went wrong, as did his temper, and he swore at one of the men. His fate was sealed. His senior immediately put him under arrest, and he was told by the colonel that he must send in his papers or undergo trial by court-martial. Of course he left the regiment.

A young officer is not even permitted to dress himself as he pleases. It was reported in the ante-room of the cuirassiers that one of the junior officers had been seen in Piccadilly wearing an inverness cloak. On his return from town he was ordered by the senior captain to produce the article in question and it was burnt before his eyes.

“Whilst you are an officer of the cuirassiers, sir,” said the senior captain, “you will dress like a gentleman, and not as if you had bought your clothes out of a slop-shop in Bloomsbury.”

Sometimes a newly-joined officer attempts the *hail-fellow-well-met* style of intercourse with his seniors, but his intentions are nipped in the bud with marvellous celerity. Such an one joined the cuirassiers during the leave season, and tried his system upon the major.

“Ah, Houghton,” said he, one day after lunch, while several officers, including the major, were standing about the ante-room fire, “will you go down to the rink with me this afternoon?”

The cool audacity of this proposal stopped every tongue in the room, and all listened breathlessly for the major’s reply.

“I don’t mind,” he said quietly, much more quietly than they expected, but probably he wished to see how far this young gentleman’s assurance would take him.

“Ah, very well. I’ll be ready about four o’clock, so come round to my rooms and look me up.”

This was a matter for the senior sub.’s notice, and although he was not in the room at the time, the conversation was quickly reported to him, and he as quickly sent for the delinquent.

“Now look here, young chap,” he began, “this sort of thing won’t do at all. If the major asks you to go anywhere with him, you will tell him whether you’ll go or you won’t, but you’ll not propose going

to the rink or anywhere else with him. And another thing, when you address him you will say ‘major’ or ‘sir.’ I am very much astonished that the major did not speak to you himself about it.”

Then life in a barrack is by no means such an existence of ease, luxury, and time-killing as novelists would fain make us believe. Take, for example, the duties of the orderly officer for the day. He must rise at six o’clock for early stables, or the whole of the subalterns suffer in consequence; then he has to go round the breakfasts, see that they are all right, and hear any complaints; then if it is not a field day he must ride with the troops to watering order; he must visit the hospital; then come morning stables, and as likely as not, if he be stationed at Aldershot or Colchester, he will be on court-martial, for which he has all the nuisance of getting into full dress, and may think himself very lucky if he miss the orderly-room business and the round of the dinners. In the afternoon he must again visit the hospital, and probably there will be a parade; certainly he will have the picket to mount, and as likely as not he will have to walk a mile or so to do it. Then he has the first hour’s rest of the day, and at half-past five he must turn out again for afternoon stables and the “teas;” then hospital once more. He does eat his dinner in peace, but he must receive the

watch-setting reports and mount the guard ere bed-time. Nor should mention be omitted of the number of times the orderly officer has to sign his name and to change his uniform. If his turn fall upon Sunday he must accompany the commanding officer round the married quarters, but as some compensation for that he escapes church parade, and so is spared the trouble of getting into full dress—no light matter, more especially in the item of the boots.

The imposition of fines is another method of punishing infringements of regimental rules. If an officer is not properly shaven, if he puts on any part of his uniform wrongly, he must pay for the champagne drunk at dinner that evening. This fine is also enforced for swearing or using bad language in the presence of the chaplain or any senior officer, and also for dropping the sword. On certain occasions an officer must pay when it is not a case of fining. If he gets promotion, if he brings home the regiment from the drill field for the first time as commanding officer, if he wins a race, or is going to be married, at all such times he has to “stand” champagne.

Our novelists do well to give their military heroes an inexhaustible rent-roll. There are very few such out of the Guards, and soldier servants have to be very well up in methods of getting rid of duns and

such other unwelcome visitors as their masters do not care to be at home to.

Another terrible mistake made by novelists is the magnificence with which they surround their heroes in quarters. If such could but once peep into the room (for an officer has seldom but one room, even if he is no longer a subaltern, excepting at Colchester, where each cavalry officer has a room about 12 feet by 14 and a tiny dressing-room, just half that size) of any ordinary hussar, dragoon, or lancer, he or she—I suspect it is most often the women who are so fond of soldier heroes—would never again depict him in rooms resembling a very fine lady's boudoir. Oh, the patched walls, the bare paint, the marks on the door where the lock gave way the last time the owner was “drawn” by his comrades, the blackened ceiling, the almost invariable absence of window-blinds, the miserable regulation fender fastened to the floor, the more miserable regulation coal-scuttle, and, most miserable of all, the regulation barrack chairs! It is all so wonderfully unlike the barrack-room of fiction. There is the very rickety crib of a bed, made to take in pieces upon occasion, and which by daytime the servant, with the aid of cretonne covers for the pillows and a fur carriage rug, converts into a sofa; and there is the dressing-table, likewise hung all round with cretonne,

and which strikes one as being remarkably high for its purpose. Just pull the cretonne curtain a little, and half the front will open, showing you that it is but a make-believe table after all, and, stripped of its hangings, would stand forth a packing-case! Well, it is both a toilette-table and a wardrobe now, for piled upon the shelves, which have been put in temporarily, are the various suits of clothes belonging to the owner of the room.

Then over there, on the other side of the room, is the inevitable chest of drawers, which, when travelling, just fit nicely inside the dressing-table. They are exactly like the drawers in every room in the barracks; are of mahogany, have brass handles, and a despatch-box and writing-desk combined in the middle drawer at the top. Then the lid of our friend's bath, being fitted with three legs which screw in and out at pleasure, makes a very convenient writing-table if covered with a cloth, and into the bath itself, for travelling, the legs go, together with the tripod, washing-stand, and the tin basin and ewer. Some officers have pianos, but they are always hired; and most officers have a few pictures and little trifles to scatter about their room. For instance, a couple of fur rugs thrown across the huge barrack arm-chairs take off from their ugliness much; and if a soldier is fortunate enough to know a lady who will

work him a cover for his cot, his room will look much more presentable. And yet at best a soldier's room is but a "shake-down;" and if he be rich or poor, he seldom attempts to make it otherwise. The handsomest room I ever saw in barracks was that of a captain of dragoons; in fact, he had been fortunate enough to secure two large rooms, those which, if he had required them, would have been allotted to the major. This man was very rich, and had certainly taken a good deal of trouble to make his rooms habitable, and yet—well, they were only barrack-rooms. There were the usual make-shifts; and when the fur rug slipped off the great easy chair in which I sat, I saw the broad straps which served for arms, and which told me it was just the same as I had seen in barrack-rooms so many times before.

The rooms of a well-known colonel of cavalry, a man who now possesses a title and thirty thousand a year, were simply beggarly, not nearly so handsome as was the one little room of his Vet., of which I had just a glimpse. And why? Because one room was the man's home; the other was not.

One more word and I have done; it concerns the fancy names bestowed upon soldiers in novels. They are all fancy names, and in real life do not exist. In no case have I ever known a name given in recognition of a man's personal comeliness, such as Cherub,

Beauty, Adonis, Apollo, Prettyface, and the like. One of the handsomest men I ever knew was commonly known as The Spider. Why, I cannot tell—not because he was like one. In closing, I will give a few names I have actually known: The Infant (weighing twenty-one stone), The Cob, David, The Winter Apple, King Kobo, Old Muzzie, The Spider, Landy-fandy-Widden, Sprouts, Bole, The Admiral, Paddy K—, Tin Whistle, Illigant John of Bath, The Lady-Killer, Mother Hubbard, Billy Buttons, Piggie, Alphabet. Most frequently men's own names are abbreviated; thus at one time in a distinguished lancer regiment there were any amount of Bills and Billys. In another of hussars, the name of David prevailed; nearly all were Davids, even a racehorse belonging to one of the officers.

When the personal appearance of an officer is not prepossessing, a name is quickly found for him. Any remark on the subject of "looks" meets with a rejoinder sharp and to the point. Said one cuirassier to another,

"Why, your nose is so stuck up, one might hang one's hat on it."

"Well, my dear chap," was the ready reply, "one certainly couldn't on yours."

And it was true enough.

A REGIMENTAL MARTYR ;
OR, HOW GERARD ST. HILARY WAS DRIVEN INTO MATRIMONY.

CHAPTER I.

“MAKE hay in St. Hilary’s room to night.”

Lieutenant Gerard St. Hilary came leisurely down the broad corridor and staircase of the officers’ quarters in the cavalry barracks at Milchester, and crossed the passage leading to the ante-room. As he turned the handle of the door a fragment of the conversation within fell upon his ear—“*Make hay in St. Hilary’s room to-night.*”

“The deuce !” ejaculated that young gentleman.

“Sentry-box him first,” cried a voice, which he recognised as Captain Gurney’s, a man well up the list of captains, who was old enough to have known better, “and if that doesn’t fetch him, hammer the door in.”

“Ha, ha, ha !” laughed a chorus of voices, under cover of which the intended victim beat a retreat.

“Sentry-box me ! Ah, thank you, Captain Gurney,” he exclaimed, when he had reached the shelter of his own room ; “forewarned is forearmed, and I’m on my guard this time.”

Hastily changing his undress for mufti, Mr. St.

Hilary made the best of his way out of barracks, going in the direction of Milchester.

The regiment of which he was butt-in-chief for practical jokes, was the 52nd Dragoons of famous Peninsular memory. Perhaps his unfailing good temper made him more subject to this form of wit than would have been the case if he had borne malice and sulked.

An outsider would, perhaps, say, Why did not he report the offenders, and so secure peace? But anyone with the least knowledge of regimental life could answer, that for a subaltern to adopt such a course would simply be to limit his career in the army to a very short period. Of course during the process he blustered a good deal, and frequently threatened to tell the chief all about it the very first thing in the morning; but, fortunately for his brother officers, Gerard St. Hilary had a peculiarity. After two a.m. he could not keep his eyes open, and was glad to make any bargain which would leave him in peace.

It was invariably the same; Lieutenant St. Hilary, lightly clad, as likely as not soaked with water, standing in the centre of a group of excited comrades in mess-dress, expressing his determination "to have no more of this foolery, by Jove."

"Go it, Jerry; pile it up, my boy!" one would cry, amidst the jeers of the bystanders.

“I’m surprised at you, D’Albert,” poor Jerry would cry, in disgust. “I’ll report you in the morning, upon my soul I will, though you are a captain.”

Small heed did the 52nd take of these awful threats. Was not the end unchanging? Presently St. Hilary would begin to shiver; then Sleep would come dropping her grains of sand into Gerard’s blue eyes, and his comrades knew that then was their time.

“Now, Jerry, old man, if you forgive us, you shall go to bed.”

“Well, let me be quiet,” was poor Jerry’s answer (it was always the same), “and I’ll say no more about it.”

The gratitude of the rioters was generally shown on these occasions by the careful way in which they tucked Gerard up in bed and reduced his room to something like order. Alas! only something. Order generally took days and a visit to the upholsterer’s to effect, with much groaning from Jerry’s man on the subject of what he called “them idjots.”

Poor Gerard had undergone every possible form of practical joking, and he was become a little tired of it; the trodden worm will turn, and he was thoroughly determined to put a stop to it once for all, though it must be owned he didn’t quite know how to set about it.

However, enough on that head. I will just explain

what is meant by “sentry-boxing” and “making hay,” and then go on with my story.

The doors of an officer’s rooms are usually made of strong material, the hammering in of which is a long process; in order, therefore, to draw the victim from his lair without his suspecting mischief they knock at his door, and tell him the colonel or the major wants him at once, or cry “Fire!” at the other end of the corridor. If this succeeds, well and good; but on gala nights the sentry-box is brought into play. It is placed close against the victim’s door, after the manner of a trap, so that when he comes out he may go crash against the back of the box. I need not add that the more bruised and angry he is the better pleased his comrades are.

Making hay is simply breaking or turning topsy-turvy everything the intruders can lay their hands upon.

The cavalry barracks at Milchester are about a mile from the town, which is a cathedral city, chiefly noted for the beauty of its young ladies and the good tone of its society.

In common with most cathedral towns Milchester was just a little dull. In summer the Botanical Gardens, and in winter the Winter Palace, were the principal places of amusement. To the latter Mr. St. Hilary made his way, it being, when my story opens,

the dreary month of November. It was an “off” day. Had the bonny dappled hounds been after their little red-coated friend, Captain Gurney would probably have come in too tired and stiff to think of anything beyond his dinner and his bed ; but there was no meet that day, and thus we have a striking instance of what Satan finds for idle hands, which is not, I trust, too severe a reflection on the gentlemen of her Majesty’s army.

It was three o’clock; the Palace was full, and a crowd of well-dressed people were promenading to the strains of “*Gerleibt und Verloren*” waltz.

Gerard passed in with all speed, and quickly made his way up and down the gay throng, as though seeking for some particular individual. He was evidently a great favourite with the fair sex, for wherever he went he was greeted with smiles and other little pleasantries. Tall, short, fair, or dark, all seemed equally pleased to see him. There were girls in blue and girls in green, in sealskin and sable, in spoon bonnets and pork-pie hats ; and for each and all he had a bright word or compliment, but he lingered with none.

He did not find the object of his search very readily, for he was a trifle short-sighted, and, as I know from experience, the wearing of an eyeglass confines one’s sight to the space immediately in front.

At last his patience was rewarded ; walking slowly with several gentlemen came a young lady, who attracted the attention and admiration of all. She was not very tall, rather under than over the middle height, with a graceful figure and carriage, delicate little hands and feet, and a small mignon face, of which the nose was just a wee bit up-turned, and the eyes were brilliant gleaming hazel. Her hair, which was extremely abundant, was twisted round her small shapely head in massive coils, and was of the deepest auburn hue. She was dressed in a tight-fitting costume of prune-coloured serge, and her hat was of the same material. Her waist and throat were clasped by heavy silver belt and necklet.

The name of this young lady was Elinor Warwick. Her father held the appointment of deputy-assistant commissary-general. She lived on the same side of the town as the barracks were situated, and was, as was natural from her father's position, on very intimate terms with both the cavalry and infantry officers stationed in Milchester.

The preference was, however, given to the former, and Mr. St. Hilary enjoyed the distinction of being Miss Warwick's slave-in-chief. Poor Gerard, slave-in-chief and butt-in-chief ! Not an enviable fate ; but the former office he would not have dele-

gated for any consideration, while words will not express Mr. St. Hilary's feelings on the subject of the latter.

It was a remarkable fact that, although ladies never could see anything in Miss Warwick, "a little pert snub-nosed thing," she always had three or four men "in tow." On that afternoon she had a cavalier either side, while one or two others made up the rear. As she said herself, "The clumsy fellows could never get out of the way; it was just like walking with outriders."

Gerard went up, his blue eyes ablaze, and sauntered alongside of her for some distance, to the intense disgust of the man he had supplanted. Miss Elinor had, however, no intention of allowing him to remain there. Her way of showing him favour was by ill-using him, yet giving him certain small liberties which she did not accord to the men she took the most pains to please. One man would say to another when she was ordering Gerard about, "I would not stand that; what a big duffer the fellow is!"

But Gerard would not have exchanged the sweet familiarity of his intercourse with Elinor for all the civil speeches in the world; in fact, it was a case of "Betty know'd her man."

"You're coming to our ball, Miss Warwick?" asked he.

“Oh, yes, of course!” she answered, in a quick, clear voice.

“How many am I to have?” pleadingly.

“I really don’t know. How many do you want?”

“Every one.”

“Well, but you can’t have them. I’ll give you one quadrille if you like, the third.”

“And four waltzes besides?”

“No,” very decisively. “I’ll give you three, if you will make yourself generally useful and agreeable this afternoon; do your duty like a man, you know.”

“May I walk home with you?”

“Well—yes.”

“I won’t do it for three,” announced he, leaning forward with a dangerous look in his blue eyes.

“Four, then,” said Elinor, in rather a frightened tone.

“And supper.”

“Now, Mr. St. Hilary, you’re asking too much. It’s not in reason.”

“And supper,” repeated our hero firmly, “or I’ll not stir an inch.”

“Well, go away.”

Away he went, having learned a soldier’s first lesson thoroughly. He managed to keep Miss Warwick in sight, and when she disappeared from the gay throng, he followed in time to help her into a huge fawn-coloured paletot, which, as the

inhabitants of Milchester remarked, “no one but Miss Warwick would have the courage to wear.”

As the two walked home together through the dreary November fog, Elinor became aware that something was amiss with her companion. More than once he sighed dolefully, and was altogether so different from the Gerard St. Hilary whose jolly laugh was heard every two minutes, that she was completely puzzled.

“Whatever is the matter, Mr. St. Hilary?” she said, at last.

“Oh!” moaned Gerard, with another long sigh, “I’ve got such a dose before me to-night.”

“A dose?”

“Yes; the fellows are going to make hay in my room to-night.”

“Make hay!” repeated Elinor, in a tone of real surprise. “What, in November?”

Then Gerard told her what he had heard, and described the process.

“I assure you, Miss Warwick,” he said, shaking his head solemnly, “that by this time to-morrow everything in my room will be smashed to bits.”

“What a shame!” cried Elinor, warmly. “If I were you I’d try—”

“What?”

She reached up to her companion’s ear, and

whispered a few words to him ; he burst into a roar of laughter.

“ By Jove, what a brick you are ! ” he cried, forgetting his manners. “ I never heard such a splendid idea in my life. Gad, what a clever girl you must be ! ”

“ It’s quite original,” she responded, saucily.

“ Its absolutely perfect,” replied Gerard, “ and worthy of you in every way. How they will hop to-night ! ”

Elinor’s musical treble joined his deeper laugh ; and as she parted from him at the gate of her father’s house, she turned back, and said impressively,

“ Mind it’s white, and don’t stint the quantity.”

“ All right,” answered Gerard ; ‘ I’ll get plenty.”

He did not go into the barracks, but walked past them straight into Milchester, meeting on his way several of the officers returning to dinner. He evaded all their enquiries and offers to go back with him, and went on his way alone. He stopped at the first tinner’s shop he came to, and purchased the largest flour-dredger they had. This he took with him, in spite of the shopman’s entreaties to be allowed to send it. He next went to a general dealer’s, and made another purchase, which he put into his pocket with much care, and as though he were very much afraid the paper might burst. What could it be ?

Lieutenant St. Hilary went to mess that night with a face as innocent as that of a little child.

“ Well, Jerry, my boy,” quoth Captain Gurney, “ what have you been doing to-day? ”

Gerard looked at his superior sideways. He would have known what this display of affectionate interest meant without any previous warning.

“ Palace,” answered he, with laconic laziness.

“ Was the lovely Elinor there? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Did you see her home? ”

“ Of course.”

“ Have tea there? ”

“ No ; I had some shopping to do,” with a little grin at the remembrance of that same shopping, “ I’m downright done up. Trailing up and down that Palace is fifty times harder work than hunting. I shall turn in early to-night, to be fit for to-morrow,” with another small grin at the look of intelligence which passed round the room. “ Are any of you fellows going to the theatre to-night? They’re having *The Rivals*. ”

“ Yes,” answered Gurney ; “ but I can’t go. I’ve promised to go in and see old Patterson to-night ; so I’m on duty.”

“ On duty,” thought Gerard ; “ on duty with a sentry-box.”

After this the conversation was on general topics ; and soon after eleven o'clock Gerard, with many yawns, departed, ostensibly to bed. To that haven of rest, however, he did not go, but, piling up his fire, threw himself into an easy chair, and quietly bided his time.

He had not long to wait ; for presently he heard the sound of men treading lightly in their stockings. Thereupon he carefully snored, so as to make them believe he was safe in the arms of Morpheus.

“ He’s fast asleep,” he heard Middleton say.

“ Then fetch it, and be quick,” was the answer.

As noiselessly as possible the heavy sentry-box was brought up and placed against his door. Then the officers, retreating, went laughing, and with much joking and bear-fighting, to their different rooms, shutting the doors with good hearty bangs, which seemed to indicate retirement for the night.

In a few moments a sharp knocking began at Gerard’s door.

“ Hallo!” bawled he, in a sleepy voice ; “ who’s there?”

“ Please, sir, the colonel wants you at once. There’s something wrong with B troop, sir.”

B troop was Gerard’s.

“ Tell the colonel to go and be hanged,” was Gerard’s unceremonious answer.

“I daren’t, sir,” was the reply.

“You daren’t! Then go and be hanged yourself! This fish don’t bite.”

“He twigs it!” shouted Middleton. “Come out, you beggar, or we’ll stove the door in!”

“Stove away, old man!” laughed Gerard, rising, and taking his flour-dredger to within a yard of the door.

“Come on!” yelled Gurney’s voice. “Yeave ho, push with a will, boys; nothing like haymaking!”

Gerard waited till they were all exerting their strength to the uttermost; then flung open the door, showering the contents of the flour-dredger upon them as they tumbled headlong into the room.

“Ah!” (sneeze.)

“Ugh!” (sneeze.)

“Brute!” (sneeze, sneeze.)

“I’ll pay you out for this!” gasped Gurney, shaking his fist at Gerard, while the tears ran down his face.

“Will you!” laughed Gerard, sending another shower full into his face; “then take that, and that, and that, and make hay elsewhere, confound you! I’m about sick of this game;” as he spoke keeping up a continual shower upon the intruders.

Raving, swearing, spitting, sneezing, choking, and stamping, the crestfallen officers made the best of their way down the corridor in all the ignominy of utter defeat. From head to feet they were covered

with the strongest white pepper, the embroidery on their mess-jackets forming grand receptacles for the frightful powder. Their hair, eyes, noses, mouths, and moustaches were all filled with it, and it was hours before the terrible sneezing and choking subsided. So thoroughly was it scattered over each practical joker, that for several days the opening of a door or window would send a fresh waft of it across the ante-room or dinner table, to the intense disgust of the more peaceably-disposed members, who were loud in their demands that for the future St. Hilary should be left in peace.

In peace, however, Gerard St. Hilary was not allowed to remain. On making his appearance in the mess-room on the morning following the *feu du poivre*, he was greeted with a volley of forage-caps, newspapers, and other small missiles of a similar character.

He came into the room with a jolly laugh, his blue eyes shining with merriment, and looking, in his well-got-up hunting costume, as he always did look, "thoroughbred."

"Expect a good run this morning, Gurney?" he began, as he sat down, "or is your cold too bad!"

"My cold?" said that gentleman interrogatively.

"Yes. I heard a good deal of sneezing in my vicinity last night."

"Ah, you rascal," cried Gurney, laughing in spite

of himself; “we are going to pay you out for that fine trick.”

“By Jove, how you did sneeze!” cried Gerard, with shrieks of laughter. “This was it, major: ‘Ugh!’ (sneeze); ‘Ah!’ (sneeze); ‘Brute!’ (choke); ‘I’ll pay you out for this!’ (sneeze, choke, choke, sneeze.) Gad, it was fine!”

“Serve them right,” growled the major; “they’ll let you alone now, St. Hilary.”

“Will we!” cried a chorus of voices; “don’t flatter yourself, Jerry.”

At this moment another officer in “pink” entered the room, and seated himself next to St. Hilary.

“Pon my soul, Jerry,” he began, “but that was a scurvy trick you played us last night. I can’t get your confounded pepper out of my moustaches.”

“That’s awkward for you, Jack,” laughed Gerard. “It’s my idea that when fellows get engaged to be married they should leave their neighbours in peace.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” answered Jack Hilton. “Anyhow, I left my man cursing you after the fashion of Rheims; but, unlike the little Jackdaw, you seem to flourish under it amazingly.”

“I had an uncommonly good night; and you’d better tell your man that ‘curses, like chickens, come home to roost.’”

“I think his come home to him with every shake of

my clothes or movement of his brush," cried Hilton, laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!" screamed Gerard, in high glee.
"Well, I must be off. Are you coming, Jack?"

At the door he turned back to fire a parting shot.

"I hope on my return, my dear fellows, to find that the influenza is somewhat improved."

"You were a big fool too, Jerry," said Jack Hilton gravely, as the two rode through the soft November fog. "I never saw any fellow in such a rage as Gurney was last night—never in all my life.* He swore he would be revenged on you; take my word for it he will. They're going to fill your bed with beetles to-night."

"That's pleasant," said Gerard grimly. "However, you are a good fellow to tell me. And now let us talk of something else; what's done cannot be undone, and I suppose I must grin and bear it."

They found the meet that day but very poorly attended. There was only one lady present. Of course that one was Elinor Warwick.

"Well," she inquired eagerly, as Gerard rode up, "how did it answer?"

"Oh, if you'd only been there!" cried Gerard, giving her a graphic description of the stampede; but, ending with, "I hear from Hilton that I am to suffer a perfect martyrdom of retaliation."

“Poor thing!” said Elinor softly; whereupon Gerard forgot all his troubles, and only remembered that, whatever happened, he would be sure of Elinor’s loving pity and commiseration.

The word which he had used to Elinor Warwick in jest was realised by him in all its stern hideousness. A martyr he in very truth became. It seemed as if his tormentors could neither forget nor forgive the *feu du poivre*. They no longer dared disturb him at night—their fear of his pepper-pot was too wholesome, but by every other means in their power did they worry and annoy him. His bed was, as Jack Hilton had predicted, filled with cockroaches; and this course was followed up by frogs, dead mice, fender and fire-irons, plentiful administration of lard and wet sponges. His boots were filled with burrs or cobbler’s wax, and, in fact, his life was made a burden to him. On the day of the ball, however, matters came to a climax.



CHAPTER II.

IT was a fortnight after the *jeu du poivre*. The officers had tried their best to get Gerard made “orderly” on that day, but failed; and, while he was down at the Palace with Miss Warwick, set their wits to work to devise some new form of torture. They went to the colonel, and asked as a great favour that dressing for mess might be excused, on the plea that it would be a great nuisance to dress twice, and their full dress was very inconvenient to dine in on account of the heat.

“You see, colonel,” said they, “we shall be obliged to dance all night, and we want to begin as cool as possible.”

With a slight demur the colonel consented, and then they knew that their trick was safe.

Gerard went in rather late, and on hearing that dressing was excused, sat down to dinner without going near his rooms. At nine o’clock one of the mess waiters came behind his chair, and whispered that his man wanted him at once.

From the sudden “hush” in the room poor Gerard suspected mischief. His man was awaiting him at the door with an anxious face.

“What’s the matter?” demanded Gerard.

“Oh, sir,” exclaimed he, “I hardly dare tell you.”

Gerard dashed up to his room, and there on the bed lay his tunics and mess jackets, with every seam neatly ripped up. Going to the ball was out of the question; etiquette would not permit him to go in ordinary evening attire.

“Don’t look like that, sir,” said Jones, in an imploring tone—for Gerard had never uttered one word, but stood gazing on the wreck of his property, growing whiter and whiter every moment—“don’t look like that; I’ve sent for the master tailor. I should think he will be able to get them sewn up in something like time.”

In a few minutes that functionary arrived, but could not promise that the work should be complete before midnight. For three weary hours did Gerard pace his room, giving no answer to the various knocks from the men who wanted to know how their trick had succeeded.

Soon after midnight Gerard was in a cab, driving as fast as possible to the assembly rooms, where the ball was given. Colonel Lifford, with whom he was a great favourite, was standing near the door when he passed in.

“Well, my boy,” he said kindly, “you are very late.”

“ Yes, sir, I am rather,” answered Gerard, his voice shaking still.

“ Why, what’s the matter, St. Hilary?—you are very white. Are you not well?”

“ Yes, thanks, colonel;” and Gerard passed on.

Now Gerard was engaged to Miss Warwick for the first, fifth, tenth, and sixteenth dances. The tenth, he very well knew, was the supper waltz. He found that the ninth was then being danced; so, after all, though he had missed two dances with her, he was not so very badly off.

He hung about looking for her, and at last saw her bright chesnut hair in very close proximity to Captain Gurney’s scarlet-clad shoulder. Gerard’s b’ue eyes flashed at the sight, for Gurney was not a favourite of Elinor’s; yet here she was sitting in an out-of-the-way corner, flirting desperately with the man who had done his best to prevent his coming to the ball.

He waited impatiently for the dance to end, that he might claim Miss Warwick for the waltz, and meanwhile amused himself by studying her face and dress, which was of white silk, unrelieved by any colour. Her hair was plaited in a long braid, and hung far below her waist; and nestling in it were two white roses, placed just at the top of the braid behind the left ear. She wore no ornaments whatever; and the only speck of colour she had about her

was a large bouquet of crimson and white flowers which Gerard had sent her. His foolish heart throbbed at the sight of it ; but it sank to zero when she raised her face, and he saw that it was as white as her dress, and that she had, what he had never seen there before, a hard glittering look in her gleaming hazel eyes.

At last the dance was ended, and the instant the signal sounded for the next one Gerard crossed the room, and, bending his arm to Elinor, said,

“ My dance, I believe.”

“ I have given your dance away,” said Miss Warwick, coolly. “ I sat out the two best waltzes of the evening waiting for you, and you really must forgive me if I did not care to waste any more.” And taking Captain Gurney’s arm she swept away.

Gerard was thunderstruck. He stood for a moment speechless with rage and astonishment. This was a catastrophe he had never bargained for. No, poor fellow ; he had expected to receive at Elinor’s hands sweetest pity and commiseration. He determined not to leave the room without an attempt at an explanation ; so he followed them, and began gently.

“ Will you not let me explain ? ”

But Elinor was too thoroughly angry to listen to reason, and she faced him haughtily.

“ Thank you, Mr. St. Hilary, that is quite un-

necessary. I assure you, it is not of the slightest consequence."

With a frigid little bow she passed away, leaving Gerard with anything but a pleasant expression on his usually pleasant face. He stood and watched them go down the room; he saw Captain Gurney bend towards her, as though he were saying something especially tender; and the sight of that, and the sound of the light laugh with which Elinor answered it, were more than he could bear. He rushed out of the room, and entering the first cab, ordered the man to drive as quickly as possible back to barracks.

"Tell you what, George," said one of his tormentors to another, "I wish I was well out of this joke; that fellow will go mad."

"Umph! Gurney is such a beggar for running an idea to death."

Gerard reached his room in a state of misery too intense for words. He felt sick and dizzy, and was thankful that for once his bed had been left in decent order. Sleep, however, he could not. He tossed about to and fro; his bed was hot and uncomfortable; and first one and then another of his comrades disturbed him by coming along the corridor with clanking of spurred boots.

At last he sank into a troubled fretful doze, which

lasted until Jones came to wake him at six o'clock, for he was orderly officer that day. When the candles were lighted, what Gerard in his agony called the "fiendishness of the plot" was revealed : from head to foot he was as white as any miller.

His man begged him not to have his usual bath, but be rubbed down with coarse towels as quickly as possible.

"If you get into water, sir," he entreated, "it will all turn to paste. I'll rub it off in a few minutes."

"You'll have to be uncommonly quick," said St. Hilary, grimly ; "for I must be out in ten minutes."

Jones rubbed and scrubbed with a will, until Gerard was quite clean and presentable, except on one point. That point showed itself with painful obtrusiveness : it was his hair. That, and his particularly long yellow moustache, were as white as the driven snow. Jones got a couple of big brushes, and worked hard ; but though a tremendous cloud of the treacherous white powder came off, no perceptible difference was made in Lieutenant St. Hilary's appearance.

"I don't know what to do, sir," said he at length, with a great sigh.

At this moment a knock was heard at the door.

"Come in," roared Gerard.

"Stables, sir," announced an orderly ; "the adjutant's out, sir, already."

This was the last ounce on the camel's back.

“Good heavens!” gasped Gerard. “Ask him to come up here.”

Presently the adjutant came up, amazed at the unusual request.

“Just look here, Harrington,” said Gerard, displaying his whitened hair; “see what those brutes have done. I can't come into sight like this.”

“Certainly not,” answered he, promptly. “I'll tell Hilton to do your duty.”

“And I say, Harrington, don't peach, there's a good chap.”

But Harrington, a “gentleman adjutant,” was a married man, and did not approve of the pranks which were carried to such excess amongst the officers of the 52nd Dragoons. So he departed without vouchsafing any reply to Gerard's continued entreaties.

He breakfasted alone, and soon after ten o'clock the colonel sent for him to the orderly room.

“What's the meaning of this, St. Hilary?” began the chief, sternly.

“I couldn't go on duty like this, sir,” said poor Gerard, deprecatingly.

“What in the world—” began the colonel, suddenly breaking off into roars of laughter, as his eyes fell upon Gerard in all the freshness of a hoary old age.

Then, recovering himself, said stiffly, "This should have been reported to me at once."

"Please, sir," said Gerard, "I've been trying to get it out."

Again the colonel was afflicted with a sudden convulsive choking, something between a cough and a sneeze.

"Well, you had better report it now."

"I don't know who did it, sir," was the reply.

"My good fellow," said his chief, "I admire your principles immensely, but you don't expect me to believe that you could be covered with flour from head to foot without knowing who did it?"

"Yes, sir," answered Gerard, laughing, "for they filled my bed."

"With flour?" said the colonel incredulously.

"I don't think it is flour, colonel; it's scented, and I think it's complexion stuff, and that, you know, is made to stick on."

"Umph! Well, you are excused duty to-day; go away." And Gerard went.

After another brushing by Jones he went to luncheon with as unconcerned a face as he could put on, and for a few moments no one took any notice of him.

Presently, however, Captain Gurney left his seat, and, coming behind him, took a leisurely survey of his still whitened locks.

“What have you been doing with yourself, my boy? Have you been acting in private theatricals, or are you going to a *bal masqué* at the Palace to-night?”

Gerard answered never a word; and with another attempt at chaff, Captain Gurney retired to his seat.

“I should advise you to let that fellow alone, Gurney,” said the surgeon-major, next to whom he was sitting; the chief’s “awfully keen about it and St. Hilary had some difficulty to prevent peaching.”

“Oh, Jerry’d never peach,” said he carelessly.

“I don’t know; but apart from that you are knocking the poor lad’s health up.”

“The poor lad’s four-and-twenty,” laughed Gurney, with a sneer.

“He cannot stand having his rest broken, and you must stop it,” said the surgeon, decisively. “If anything more of this kind occurs I shall report it immediately. I won’t stand by and see any fellow’s health tampered with, and this persecution has gone on beyond all bounds.”

Gerard St. Hilary sat throughout the meal in dignified silence, and presently his dog-cart with his high-stepping roan mare was brought round, and he drove away in the direction of Colonel Warwick’s house.

The young lady’s anger had cooled down during

the night, and she was repenting very bitterly her unkindness of the previous evening. She told herself that she ought to have listened to his excuses. If, as Captain Gurney had hinted, he had purposely avoided dancing the two first dances with her, why had he come for the supper waltz of all others? He would never ask her to make friends again, and she had thrown away her life's happiness at the instigation of a man she thoroughly disliked and despised. Poor Elinor! She did not realise, till she thought she had lost him, how very dear the yellow-haired, blue-eyed dragoon had grown to her!

She sat alone in her pretty drawing-room—alas, that she had no mother to share it with her!—and wondered, with a dull aching at her heart, whether all those happy days were past and gone, never to return.

She heard a carriage drive up to the door, but so little did she expect Gerard that, when he was ushered into the room, she uttered a low cry of surprise and joy, and went with outstretched hands to greet him.

“So you have forgiven me?” said Gerard, forgetting all his sorrows at the sight of her tender hazel eyes.

Elinor hung her head, the painful blushes coming thick and fast.

“I was very rude last night, and unkind, but I thought—” she stammered.

“You thought what?” said Gerard, eagerly.

“I—I thought you did not care to dance so many times with me, for Captain Gurney said you were lounging about your rooms doing nothing.”

“Curse him!” muttered Gerard under his breath. “So you thought I had forgotten you, did you, darling? And if I had, would you have minded much?”

Elinor did not speak; and, strange to say, Gerard did not notice the omission, for he established her in a low chair in front of the blazing fire, and bending over her, said, in a dangerously gentle voice,

“My child, you were very cruel to me last night; nothing else than the cause which kept me away could have held me from your side.”

Then he told her all his troubles, and showed her his still whitened hair, which, in her agitation, she had not noticed. Poor Elinor was in an agony of confusion and regret.

“Can you ever forgive me?” she murmured.

“Yes, my love, on one condition—that, as a penance for your sins, you give me your darling self.”

“That will be a curious penance,” said Elinor, looking upwards lovingly. “No penance at all.”

“Don’t be too sure. I shall be horribly jealous, and exacting to a degree. I shall not allow any flirting, and shall probably make your life a burden to you.”

“I shall not want to flirt,” whispered Elinor.

“Won’t you, my darling? Will your great, stupid, lumbering husband content you?”

Elinor thought he would—she thinks so still.

* * * * *

Amongst the regimental plate of the 52nd is a large golden pepper-pot, encrusted with jewels, and the date engraved thereon is that of Gerard St. Hilary’s wedding. It was given by Elinor’s wish in remembrance of the regimental martyrdom which had gained for her the truest heart that ever beat, though her husband frequently assures her that he had made up his mind ages before, so that it only hastened matters by a few weeks.



A REGIMENTAL VALENTINE;
OR, HOW PATRICK O'SHAUGHNASSY WAS HELPED INTO
MATRIMONY.

CHAPTER I.

“RUN?” said Patrick O’Shaughnassy, in answer to a question put to him, as he slipped into his chair at the early mess-dinner, just as the soup was being served; “run? B-y Jove! I should think I did run, as hard as ever I could lay legs to ground!”

“What made you so late, Pat?” inquired George de Lyle, the “senior sub.,” next to whom he sat.

“Up at the colonel’s. Mrs. Lifford had a lot of girls in to tea, and I couldn’t get away,” he answered. “Just had seven minutes to get here and dress in.”

“Sharp thing, that. Why didn’t you wait for the late dinner?”

“Concert down town; can’t get off going.”

“Did you try?” said De Lyle slyly.

“Well, no,” said the other honestly, “I didn’t.”

Mr. De Lyle laughed, and, when after a very hurried meal Pat O’Shaughnassy rose from the table, re-

marked to his neighbour on his other hand that “it really is an awful pity, but Pat, poor devil, is going the way of all the others.”

“What way’s that?” said the man in question, who, being brother to one of the officers, and only a visitor in barracks, did not understand the allusion ; “I don’t see anything amiss with him.”

“I’ll tell you,” answered De Lyle. “You must know that the colonel is guardian to a niece, who is immensely rich and very pretty, but the most terrible flirt in creation. Well, whenever a young fellow joins, it is part of the programme that he shall go through a course of instruction at Miss Lifford’s hands. They all do, just as children have the measles and the whooping-cough.”

“And how old is Miss Lifford?”

“Oh, perhaps two-and-twenty ; and really the very nicest girl you ever met. She takes them all in hand, and, somehow, contrives to keep good friends with them, even after they’ve got their dismissal. Now the joke is, that Pat O’Shaughnassy has known her ever since she left school ; and as he stands second on the list of subs., he might reasonably be expected to know better. Within the last few weeks he has literally lived to the tune of Alys Lifford. The days he is on duty he is an absolute nuisance to every one ; indeed, I am obliged to lock my

door against him. And yet, do you know, I'm sorry for him, for he's a downright good sort of chap."

An hour later the regular mess-dinner was in full swing, when suddenly Captain Gurney asked "what had got Pat O'Shaughnassy?"

"The old game," answered a voice from the other end of the table.

"Silly fool!" remarked the senior captain, with great contempt.

"He's not been polished off quite so soon as they usually are," observed Jack Hilton. "I should have thought Miss Lifford would have got sick of him by this time."

"Don't know," laughed another. "Pat's very amusing sometimes. I heard a lady ask him, at St. Hilary's wedding, whether his name was pronounced O'Shanassy or O'Shaucknassy, as she knew both families. Pat told her, with the most barefaced coolness, that he wasn't an Irishman at all; he came from Kent."

"Awfully good!" cried a chorus of laughing voices.

"Ah, but he said a neater thing than that," put in Jack Hilton. "One day last week Miss Lifford asked us to go into tea on Sunday afternoon; and Pat said, gravely, 'I think I will be on duty, but I'll

come if I can ; but if I don't come, you won't expect me.'"

This raised another laugh. Most of my readers are probably aware that it does not take much to provoke mirth and hilarity at a military dinner-table.

"Stop a bit, stop a bit," cried Jack ; "you haven't heard the cream of the joke yet. On Sunday, you know, young Drew was on duty ; so Pat and I went up to the chief's together.

"'So you managed to get off,' said Alys, as we went in.

"'Well, no I didn't,' answered Pat.

"'Then how is it you're not in barracks?' she asked, evidently thinking he had been fool enough to sneak out unawares.

"'Because I told Micky Drew's man to call him early this morning ; and faith, the poor chap got up, in all the cold, and did my work, without being any the wiser.'"

"And the beauty of the joke is," continued Hilton, "that Pat, in his innocence, really thinks he has stolen a march upon Drew, and hasn't a ghost of an idea that his name was changed for Drew's in the order-book late on Saturday night."

"How was it his man did not tell him?" said some one.

"Because, to make all complete, Pat told him that

Mr. Drew was going to take his duty to-morrow; and, of course, the man having seen the order-book, thought nothing about it. It was pure good luck his pitching upon Drew, though."

"By George!" exclaimed Captain Gurney, "this is the 12th, surely. We must send Pat a valentine!"

"So we must!" cried the others.

"I wonder if Miss Lifford will send him one?" said Fred Gordon.

"Not she. Suppose we send him one from her."

"So we will. What shall it be? Hollo, Gurney! what have you got in your head now?"

For the senior captain was leaning with both elbows on the table, his face buried in his hands. Presently he raised it.

"Wait a minute, you fellows," he said, slowly. "Pat's on duty to-morrow, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll write a proposal from him to Miss Lifford, and send the note by an orderly; her answer, which is safe to be a refusal, will be a grand surprise for him on St. Valentine's day."

This daring proposition was received in silence; the officers of the 52nd Dragoons looked from one to another in speechless amazement, mingled with admiration for the master-mind which had conceived this brilliant plot.

At length Fred Gordon relieved his feelings by a prolonged “B—y Jove!” and then the whole assembly broke out into a torrent of eager questions.

“Will it be safe?”

“You’ll tell us exactly what to say to Pat?”

“You’ll write as if from him?”

“I suppose she is quite sure to refuse him?” said Jack Hilton, doubtfully.

“Safe to,” replied Captain Gurney, confidently, “it will be the best joke we have had since St. Hilary got spliced.”

“Who will write it?” said George Wintringham; “because it must be done carefully, and made spoony enough.”

“I’ll write the rough copy,” replied Captain Gurney, “and then we must get hold of some of Pat’s writing to imitate.”

“You need not do that,” announced Fred Gordon; “Billy Childers writes exactly the same fist as Pat.”

“Are you sure?”

“Perfectly certain; I don’t think even Pat himself could tell the difference; and Miss Lifford will not be so familiar with his hand as all that.”

By the united efforts of the officers the following letter was produced:

Cavalry Barracks, Milchester,
February 13th.

My dear Miss Lifford,—I have been trying for some time to
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speak to you on a subjeet which lies very near my heart; but, somehow, I have never had an opportunity. I am not much of a hand at letter-writing, but I think you must know what I mean. Will you marry me, darling? That I love you with all my heart and soul you must have known for some time, and, faith! I can't help thinking you do care a little for me.

I am fast all day in this dreary barrack-square, so won't you send me one little word to say you will be my valentine to-morrow? and make the very happiest man in the world into

PATRICK O'SHAUGHNASSY.

Captain Gurney read this brilliant production aloud.

“There!” he exclaimed, in a self-satisfied tone, “I think that reads like Pat, particularly the wind up. Can any of you suggest an improvement?”

There was a general reply in the negative; they all considered it beyond improving.

“One of you run up to Pat's room and get some of his own paper; it will be in the blotting-book on the writing-table—don't bring that with the regimental crest on; bring his own.”

Fred Gordon said he would go. He very soon returned with the spoils, and the letter was copied and ready for sending in no time.



CHAPTER II.

THE following day Captain Gurney sent an orderly to Colonel Lifford's house with the letter, and after some little time the man returned, with a note directed in Alys Lifford's bold handwriting to P. O'Shaughnassy, Esq. According to orders, he took it to Captain Gurney's room, where several of the conspirators were waiting to receive it. Their senior, however, locked it up, out of harm's way, saying,

“I suppose a lot of young fools like you would be tearing it open, because your curiosity could not wait till another day; but I'll have none of that nonsense. No; here it stays until I post it, and you will see it opened with the others to-morrow at luncheon.”

“Are you going to post it?” said Billy Childers, in amazement.

“Why, of course, you young duffer; you don't suppose I'm going to give it to Pat, do you? Lord bless the child, he's as innocent as a serpent! If it were not posted Pat would smell a rat directly, and never believe it came from Miss Lifford at all.”

The answer was accordingly posted; and on the following day, as usual on the feast of St. Valentine,

all the letters were saved until luncheon, at which meal the officers were assembled to enjoy the fun.

“Here’s one for you, Chim,” said Patrick O’Shaughnassy,” taking a packet from the heap ; “ come, open it out, man, and let us see.”

The packet contained a lady’s long fur ruff, and a very official-looking note, purporting to have come from the commanding officer of the 90th Hussars (for Mr. Drew had only a few months before exchanged into the 52nd from that regiment), to the effect that the caudal appendage had been found in Sub-Lieutenant Drew’s quarters, and was therefore forwarded, with a request that any other such property which Mr. Drew might have left behind should be at once removed, otherwise his late quarters in ——Barracks would be seriously incommoded.

Mr. Drew might certainly have passed for the missing link we hear so much about, and his regimental cognomen of Chimpanzee, more often shortened into Chim, suited his personal appearance to a nicety. As usual, he had to laugh off his chagrin with the best grace he could muster, when, happily for him, the general attention was diverted from him, as Patrick O’Shaughnassy carelessly picked up from the heap on the table the delicately perfumed crested note, which was to convey such startling news to him. He did not dream that it

came from Miss Lifford, and turned it over with infinite contempt.

“Ugh!” said he, “an afternoon tea, I suppose. ‘My dear *Captain O’Shaughnassy*’—Ah, I know their little ways.”

“For the love of heaven, don’t sit drivelling there, man!” cried an impatient voice.

“Oh, it isn’t a valentine,” remarked another, in a disappointed tone, when O’Shaughnassy took out a note and began reading it.

“Go on with the others,” said Gurney, in order to avert suspicion; a command which no one obeyed, all being too busy watching Pat, amid a silence which had become quite oppressive.

“What the d—” began he, then checked himself, and turning the paper over, read it again; changing colour the while from scarlet to white, then from white to scarlet, as though he could not make up his mind which was most becoming to his complexion, finally compromising the matter by remaining the colour of a mangel-wurzel. He picked up the envelope and examined it; then he took up the letter again carefully.

“Well,” he said at last, surveying the eager faces crowding round him, “you chaps have got yourselves into a fine shindy this time, and no mistake about it.”

“What is it? what does she say?” they cried, as with one voice.

“Upon my—,” he began.

“Here, give it me,” said Gurney, who began to suspect Pat was right, and they had got into a “shindy,” as he said—“give it to me;” at the same time snatching it out of his hands, and reading it quickly.

It was not a very long epistle, but its contents elicited an oath, not loud, but deep, from between the reader’s closed teeth.

“I told you so,” said Pat, reassuringly.

“What is it?” cried the others. “She has not, surely, accepted you?”

O’Shaughnassy nodded.

“Oh, well, it’s all right, then,” said Gordon, in a relieved tone. “Pat’s got all he wants, and she need never know anything at all about it: a very good thing for Pat, I say.”

“Perhaps Pat says the contrary,” interposed that young gentleman. “I’ve not asked Miss Lifford to marry me, and, what is more, I am not going to do so. I don’t intend to marry a woman simply to get you fellows out of a scrape. No, no; Pat O’Shaughnassy may be a thundering fool, but he’s not quite such an idiot as to do that.”

“Why, Pat,” exclaimed Jack Hilton, “we all thought you were ‘dead nuts’ on Miss Lifford.”

“Did you, really? Well, all I have to say is, that

you've got yourselves into a pretty shindy this time, and won't there be old Harry to pay when the chief comes home! By Jove! I wouldn't stand in your shoes for a good sum. Perhaps, after this, you will be leaving your neighbour's private affairs alone."

"Dash it all!" snapped Gurney, "why can't you marry Miss Lifford, and have done with it? You've been dangling after her, morning, noon, and night, for weeks."

"To tell you the honest truth, my dear fellows," said Mr. O'Shaughnassy, with slow deliberation of utterance, "to tell you the honest truth—*I am already engaged to be married!*"

CHAPTER III.

If the hero of this little history had suddenly emptied a pail of iced water over the group of officers assembled in the mess-room of the Milchester Barracks, a more perceptible shiver could not have run through them. Not a word was spoken. The brave men who would have cheered their troops on against an enemy, or faced grim death without a sign of flinching, looked in one another's faces blankly, each asking a tacit question—"What are we to do?" receiving for answer—"I'm dashed if I know!"

In their midst stood Patrick O'Shaughnassy, taller, by some inches, than any of them ; his arms carelessly crossed upon his broad chest ; his good-humoured face wearing a pleasant smile, and his gray eyes—real Irish eyes they were—shining with mirth. At last the smile deepened into a laugh, which displayed strong white filbert-shaped teeth.

“ Well, as I said before, gentlemen, you've got yourselves into a pretty shindy.”

“ No one can compliment you on the pleasing variety of your remarks,” sneered Captain Gurney ; “ that's the fourth time you've made that brilliant observation.”

“ So it is. Well, Gurney, you've a very good opportunity of showing your wonderful cleverness,” said Pat, who could afford to be civil, “ and letting the world see if you are as clever at getting out of scrapes yourself as you are of getting other fellows in. When you've got the thing settled, I'll change the ‘into’ into ‘out,’ and say it as many times again. I'm going now. I shouldn't like my presence to be any hindrance to the general conversation. Good-bye.”

With a gay laugh, O'Shaughnassy went noisily out of the room, and ran quickly up the echoing corridor to his own domain. Safely there, he immediately locked the door, and flinging himself on his bed, indulged in the luxury of a hearty laugh, rolling over

and over—burying his face in the pillows to smother the sound of his hilarity. At last he calmed down a little, and, smoothing out Miss Lifford's letter, which he had recaptured from Captain Gurney, read it again with care. I mentioned before that it was not lengthy; indeed, it ran thus :

You have made me happy—very happy indeed. Of course I will be your valentine to-morrow. Whose should I be, if not yours?—Always your own,

ALYS.

Mr. Patrick O'Shaughnassy kissed the crumpled paper rapturously.

“ My darling, my sweet Alys! ” he murmured, blissfully. Then his more natural mode of expressing his satisfaction came in the words, “ By Jove! what a lucky chap I am! ”

Could Mr. O'Shaughnassy be alluding to the young lady about whom there had been so much discussion below?

His next movement was to change his uniform for plain clothes, and, after locking Miss Lifford's note in a secure place, to light a cigar, and proceed to search amongst the chāos on the table for a pair of gloves. Whilst he was thus employed, some one tried to open the door.

“ Come in! ” roared Pat. “ Come in, you fool, can't you? Oh, the door's locked, is it? Well, old man, ” as Jack Hilton came in, “ what's up now? ”

“ Pon my word,” began Jack, dolefully, “ how the deuce we are to get out of this business I don’t know ; I’ve a good mind to send my papers in at once.”

“ About the best thing you can do,” said Pat, consolingly, and still continuing his search ; “ and as you’re going to be married, it won’t make much odds to you.”

“ By George ! but Gurney is in a funk.”

“ And so should I be,” said Pat, “ if I were in his shoes—a confounded fool ! It’s to be hoped this will cure him. Well now,” having found his gloves, “ I must be off ; ta-ta !”

“ Stop, stop !” cried Hilton ; “ where are you going ? To the colonel’s ?”

“ Now, my good fellow, do you expect me to go and patch up your damages just by being asked ?”

“ O Lord ! I didn’t know ; you always do go there.”

“ If it’s any satisfaction to you to know it, I’m going into Milchester.”

“ To meet Miss Lifford ?” said Hilton, eagerly, like a drowning man ready to catch at the weakest straw.

“ I am not going to meet Miss Lifford,” said Pat, looking back at the door, and closing it just in time to escape a missile, in the shape of a boot, which Mr. Hilton flung at his head. Ah, it is only in a university or a barrack that one man can go into another man’s room and fling his own boots at his head without

provoking offence! Truly there is something of Arcadia in both places!

When Patrick O'Shaughnassy told Jack Hilton he was going into Milchester, he was speaking sober truth; for into that most dreary of dreary towns he really did go. At the first stand, however, he took a cab, and pulling up the blind windows, ordered the man to drive to Colonel Lifford's. The chief's house was in the centre of a village about a mile and a half from Milchester, on the road which led past the barracks.

Having satisfied himself by a peep from the little window at the back that none of the officers were in sight, he slipped out, telling the driver to come back in an hour, and answer no questions.

He found Alys Lifford sitting alone in the drawing-room, and, as she sprang up with pretty eagerness to meet him, took her bodily into his arms.

“My darling! My best and dearest!”

For some time their conversation was not rational, nor indeed was it fluent. Then Patrick, feeling that “life is short and time is fleeting,” set about broaching to Miss Lifford the subject which was just then occupying the attention of the gentlemen in the Milchester Barracks.

“My darling,” he began, with a cough, “you got a note from me yesterday?”

Miss Lifford raised her head from his shoulder and regarded him with blank amazement.

“Of course I did, and answered it. You didn’t write to me again, did you?”

“I didn’t write at all,” blurted out Pat.

“Did not write at all? What do you mean? Are you mad, Mr. O’Shaughnassy?”

“Well, it was ‘them.’ I knew nothing at all about it till I got your letter this morning.”

“*Them?*” repeated Alys, slowly, unconsciously using Pat’s ungrammatical form of speech. “Did they write the letter I got yesterday?”

“Yes, confound them!”

“And did they see my answer?”

“I could not help it,” said Pat, humbly. “What was one against so many? You won’t be angry with me, will you, my darling?”

“Captain Gurney and Mr. Hilton,” said a servant, opening the door.

Alys Lifford came forward as the two men walked into the room.

“I never, in all my life, heard of such an ungentlemanly, disgraceful action, never. I could not have believed it possible. Unmanly, cowardly!” she cried, passionately, though the sound of tears was in her voice. “I do not know which of you is the worst or the most to be blamed; but as surely as

I am Alys Lifford, I will never speak to any of you again."

She vanished into an inner room, and the three men stood as if turned to stone. All the colour faded from Patrick O'Shaughnassy's ruddy face, leaving it as white as death. He crossed the room to where his senior was standing, and gripped his shoulder with trembling fingers.

"As I live, I'll pay you out for this fine trick," he said, in a low voice, shaking with suppressed passion. "You shall live to repent it, confound you!"

Then he stalked out of the room without another word.

"I shall send in my papers at once," said Jack Hilton, in the tone of a martyr. "As for you, Gurney, you had better shoot yourself."

"Umph!" said Captain Gurney, doubtfully.

CHAPTER IV.

A WEEK passed away, and still Colonel Lifford did not return from his leave. The officers of the 52nd, during that time, went through various stages of misery.

Occasionally they displayed symptoms of swaggering bravado, but they neither deceived themselves nor

each other ; and the general tone of society in the mess-room might be fairly described as “hang-dog.” Colonel Lifford was a martinet of the very fiercest calibre, and the dread with which his return was anticipated was simply pitiable.

The state of Mr. O’Shaughnassy’s temper did not add to the general hilarity of the community. As George De Lyle expressed it, “Pat was for all the world like a bear with a sore head.”

None of them ventured into his room, nor indeed said a word to him on any subject whatever, except one or two who were not involved in the scrape.

Jack Hilton kept his word and sent in his papers, so consequently felt a little more at his ease than his comrades ; and Miss Lifford kept her word and “cut” the whole of them, which was, as Thorald told her, an awful shame, on the strength of which she made an exception in his favour, and flirted with him in a disgraceful manner. For poor Patrick O’Shaughnassy she had no mercy. At the Cathedral, Palace, or theatre, and at all other places where they met, she did not deign to notice him in the least, though he, poor fellow, as all his comrades knew, tried again and again to soften her wrath.

At the end of a week the news came that Colonel Lifford had fallen in the hunting-field and broken his arm. I’m afraid his officers were not so sorry as they

should have been ; but the accident meant to them a respite, and when Mrs. and Miss Lifford departed to join the sick man, they fell back into their old ways and breathed freely once more.

Patrick O'Shaughnassy's ill-temper, however, increased visibly, and, after a fortnight not very pleasantly passed, he announced that he had got a month's leave and was going to be married.

“Going to be married !” cried the officers in chorus.
“Why, Pat, we all thought——”

“What business had you to think, then ?” retorted Pat, it must be owned somewhat uncourteously. “I can't stand this any longer ; so I'm going to get married, and see if that will mend it.”

At the door he fired a parting shot.

“And I hope you'll find it pretty warm when the chief comes back.”

“Selfish brute !” remarked Captain Gurney, when he had gone.

“Poor devil !” commented De Lyle. “I never thought Pat would have taken it so much to heart. Anyway, I do pity the girl.”

The weeks slipped away and still Colonel Lifford was absent ; his broken arm proved very troublesome, and he had received such a shaking from his fall that his medical advisers forbade his returning to duty for some time. At length he was able to do so, and the

major announced that he might be expected on the 7th of the month, during the week that the Yeomanry Cavalry were assembled in Milchester for their annual training. This news filled the gallant officers of the 52nd anew with dismay and consternation. They were in “no end of a funk, by Jove.” And when it was reported that he had arrived in the town, and did not make his appearance in the barracks, it was considered a very bad sign, from which they inferred that his wrath was indeed terrible.

Whilst this black state of affairs was being discussed in the ante-room, Patrick O’Shaughnassy walked in, looking as bright and jolly as if he had never had a trouble in his life.

“I hear the chief’s back to-day,” he said, with a hearty laugh. “I suppose you men are all quaking in your shoes!”

No one answered, and there was silence until Gordon said that they understood he had gone away to be married.

“So I did,” he answered.

“And didn’t it come off? We never saw any announcement.”

“Come off? Of course it did. The missis is down at the ‘Royal Swan.’”

“Who is she?” asked Billy Childers.

“Who is she? Why Mrs. O’Shaughnassy, of course.”

“Shall we see her at the ball those yeomanry fellows give to-night?”

“Oh, yes. Good-bye. Wish you good luck for to-morrow.”

A few hours later, the officers of the dragoons went into the brilliantly lighted ball-room.

“Do you think the O’Shaughnassys have come?” said De Lyle to one of the hosts.

“Yes, half an hour ago at least. What a pretty girl she is! You’ll see them somewhere about,” said he, and moved away.

“There’s Pat,” said Gurney; “and, by the Lord Harry, he’s dancing with Alys Lifford! What does that mean?”

“She looks happy enough, and better friends than Pat’s wife will like if she hears the story.”

“Oh, she never will hear it. Pat isn’t such a fool as to tell her himself. I wonder which is she?”

“There’s Pat. I say, Pat, aren’t you going to introduce us to your wife?”

“Oh, yes, to be sure. Come along.”

He led them across the room to where a lady, dressed in the richest bridal costume, was talking with other ladies.

“My darling, here are some of my brother-officers come to make your acquaintance,” he said. “Captain Gurney and Mr. Gordon—Mrs. O’Shaughnassy.”

To their unspeakable astonishment, Mrs. O’Shaugh-

nassy had the dark eyes, the pure profile, and the smiling mouth of Alys Lifford.

“Why—Miss Lifford!” gasped young Gordon.
“I—I—you—at least—”

“Ah,” she laughed, “you are thinking of the tragic vow I made the day I found you out. Well, I have kept it. I am not Alys Lifford now, you know.”

“And I think I kept mine,” laughed her husband joyously. “I think I paid you all out. Oh, did we not steal a march upon you! I can tell you, though, it was precious hard work keeping up the sulks.”

Although everything came to such a happy and orthodox ending, Colonel Lifford said a few words the next day, which brought the tingling blood into the cheeks and ears of his listeners; and, since that time, Captain Gurney finds it as well to leave his friends' private affairs in their own hands. He has learnt from experience that there is a Nemesis which repays even such apparently insignificant unkindness as he took so much pleasure in inflicting upon others, for into two of the most pleasant houses amongst the married officers of the 52nd he is never asked; and although Gerard St. Hilary and Patrick O'Shaughnassy, having obtained their hearts' desire, would willingly forget and forgive past offences, their wives imperatively decline to give Captain Gurney the chance of making more mischief, on the very sensible ground that “prevention is better than cure.”

A REGIMENTAL POET; OR, BORROWED PLUMES.

AUTHOR OF "A REGIMENTAL MARTYR," "A REGIMENTAL VALENTINE."

CHAPTER I.

It was just eleven o'clock when Stephen Thorold went up the dreary stone staircase to his rooms on the second floor of the block, known as G, in Colchester Barracks. He was very tired, for he had been orderly officer for the day, with the delight of a court-martial thrown in. The colonel had been particularly disagreeable all day, and he had after dinner, worse luck, as he told himself, somehow got into conversation with the major, who had talked the prosiest and driest of "redbook" for two long hours. It was, therefore, with a sense of intense relief that he found himself free to go to bed, with no fear of being orderly officer again for at least a week.

He went slowly up the empty, echoing stairs, his sword clanking after him noisily, and entered his room, banging the door to, as if he wanted to try the strength of its panels and the reliance to be placed on its lock. Everything looked very comfort-

able and inviting; the fire blazed brightly in the grate and cast a pleasant, mellow glow over the whole apartment; the crimson curtains, drawn closely over the windows—there were no blinds—if a little faded and shabby by daylight, looked well and cosy enough in the fire-light's fitful glow, which danced and gleamed over everything—now on the broad frames of the pictures, then on the ivory keys of the open piano. It flickered across Stephen's crisp, curly, yellow hair, and for a moment dazzled his tired grey eyes, so that he had to put up his hand to shade them. Then he slipped off his belts, hung his forage cap on one of the pegs behind the door, and sank lazily into the huge arm-chair, with a sigh of the deepest content that the worries of the day were over. And it certainly had been a tiresome day; he didn't know what had possessed the chief lately but he was very different to what he used to be: perhaps it was with getting married! And then a vision of a bright face, with ruddy brown hair and laughing blue eyes, came before him and he decided that matrimony could not surely be the cause of the lamentable alteration in the commanding officer of his regiment. But, all the same, the bright face and the ruddy brown hair and laughing blue eyes did not belong to Mrs. Lifford, but to Judith Scrope, the fifth daughter of the brigadier-major's father-in-law; that is to say, she was Mrs.

Winton's only unmarried sister. Stephen wondered wistfully what she had been doing all day? He had passed her house, or rather the brigadier-major's house, that morning, when he rode with the troops to watering order, but not a glimpse of her had he seen, either in going or returning. There had been a garden party up at Lexden, he believed; he wondered had Judith been there? He hardly thought so: she had said a few days before that it was getting too cold for garden-parties, particularly as she did not care much for lawn-tennis. Having arrived at this important conclusion, Stephen thought he would go to bed; he upheaved himself therefore out of his chair, locked his door, kicked his boots off, not without an anathema upon their tightness, and, after a careful survey of himself in the glass, went into the little inner room where his bed was, and in less than two minutes was sound asleep. But in that sleep—at least, it seemed so to him, it was not like the half-moment between sleeping and waking, but must have been drawn out over hours—Stephen had a dream, a truly awful one, for he dreamed that Judith Scrope had married the Devil, and that they had come to take him away to the infernal regions, that they might there amuse themselves and the numberless legions of the imps and fiends, by putting him to death by torture of the most cruel and lingering description.

As might reasonably be expected, Stephen Thorold awoke with a start, trembling in every limb, and with great beads of agony standing out upon his forehead. There was a great noise going on, and for a moment he hardly realised that he had just then no fiends to encounter worse than his brother-officers and comrades-in-arms. As soon as the truth of the situation flashed across his brain, he jumped out of bed and opened the door into his sitting room. Pouf! It was all filled with smoke! Then those confounded idiots were trying to blow his door in. Ugh! the rooms would smell of gunpowder for a week. He went back to bed and laid listening to them. He could hear hushed voices just outside the door, then a dead silence, save for a faint sound as of one metallic substance tapping against another! He knew what that meant well enough; they were filling the lock with powder. Then there was a breathless pause, followed by a scramble across the landing and a *fouf-f-f-fizz-bang!* Stephen leaned out of bed, and, as the smoke gradually cleared away, saw, with a thrill of intense satisfaction, that the door had not given way. Of course he did not doubt for a moment that they would ultimately succeed in effecting an entrance—he had been there too often for that—but still it was some satisfaction to know that they had had a good deal of

trouble in doing it. He lay peeping round the door between the two rooms, so that he might hear what went on, and yet be ready to jump under the bed-clothes and feign slumber when the crisis did come. They were wonderfully quiet ; whatever could they be at now ? He had not the smallest hope that they had gone away and left him in peace ; he knew them all too well !

“ Scatter a good lot under the door,” he heard a voice say ; Chantry’s he thought it was.

“ All right,” was answered with a laugh.

Quick as thought Stephen sprang out of his bed. “ Confound them ; the whole place will be on fire,” he muttered, then ran and flung the door open. “ What the devil do you want ? ” he asked fretfully. “ Hang it, I do think you might choose a night when a poor devil hasn’t been on duty.”

He might as well have talked to the winds ! There were eight or ten of them, all flushed with champagne and full of mischief, exasperated by the two tedious hours they had to remain, whilst the major was prosing to Stephen. Amongst the babel of voices Stephen’s was lost entirely, and they shoved him in with scant ceremony, and began “ hay-making ! ”

Poor Stephen was so thoroughly tired and sleepy that he almost dozed off as he stood, notwithstanding the general havoc which was being made

of his furniture. He half hoped they were going to leave him in peace and quietness, when they had turned everything thoroughly topsy-turvy, and he wished they would be quick and get their task done.

Unfortunately, he had left the despatch box drawer in his chest open, and, one of them perceiving it, half-a-dozen hands plunged into it instantly ; that roused him quickly enough.

“ Oh ! confound it,” he exclaimed, energetically, and rushed into the midst of the excited group, “ leave that alone, will you ? ”

But the harder he fought, the more they persisted in ransacking the contents of the drawer. He raved, he cursed, he swore, to no more purpose than making them laugh.

He was a fine strong young fellow, nearly six feet in his stockings ; but what was the strength of one man—in his night shirt too, and with bare feet, which every now and then got a prick from his tormentors’ spurred heels—against so many ?

“ Hold him fast, can’t you ? ” said Captain Gurney, in an authoritative voice, as Stephen almost succeeded in wrenching a handful of papers out of his grasp. “ Oh, by jove, they’re poems ! ”

A shriek of laughter greeted this announcement, and Stephen struggled yet more fiercely to shake off his captors’ grip.

“They’re poems,” said Captain Gurney complacently, crossing the room leisurely and proceeding to light the two tall candles on the mantel-shelf. “Ye-es, they’re poetical effusions. Now, if you’ll keep the young cub quiet, I’ll read them aloud.”

A cheer of applause greeted his proposal, followed by renewed but ineffectual efforts from Stephen to free himself. At length, however, order was sufficiently restored for the senior captain to make himself heard.

“To an old glove!” he began amid loud cheers and an authoritative order of “Silence!”

Crumpled and buttonless,
Tarnished and torn;
You’re to be pitied, but—
You she has worn.

Pressing her little hand,
Happy you were;
You toyed with her earring,
Played with her hair.

Fortunate more than all,
Blessed finger tips;
You kissed her dainty cheek,
Even her lips.

“Rather strong that,” said the reader, by way of comment.

Constant companion,
But for a day;
Truly your happiness
Fleeted away!

Why all this rhapsody ?

You're but a glove,
Bringing before me
The ghost of a love.

Like you, love faded, and
Lightly was worn,
Lightly was thrown away,
Tarnished and torn !

“ So she tossed you over, did she, Stephen ? ” said Hugh Chillingly, more commonly known as the “ Cabbage.”

But Stephen, finding his efforts unavailing, had relapsed into sulky silence, and did not reply.

“ Old Stephen looks as black as a double-distilled thunder-cloud,” laughed Jennyns, sending a pellet of paper at Stephen’s head.

“ Here’s another,” said Gurney, at that moment.

“ Oh, let’s have it by all means ! ” cried Hunt. “ Don’t be shy, Stephen ; never mind chaff, old chap. Tell them to do better if they can.”

“ Devil take you,” growled Stephen civilly.

“ By no means,” his comrade returned sweetly ; “ I always like to encourage juvenile efforts.”

“ Shut up ! ” Stephen cried, trying once more to get away from his warders.

“ Do you want to hear any more ? ” Gurney asked.

“ Yes, yes,” they all cried ; “ let’s have them all.”

“ All right ; then here goes.”

THE PRISONER AND THE FLOWER.

A prisoner had a flow'ret,
That grew within the niche
Of his window, barred with iron—
In his flow'ret he was rich !

It was his sole possession,
His garden and his park ;
It made his cell less dreary,
And his gloomy life less dark.

A ray of sunshine used to come,
For one hour of the day ;
The flow'ret drank its radiance,
And flourished bright and gay.

A wall was built beyond the cell,
It blocked the sunbeam bright ;
The flow'ret drooped and faded, for
It missed the cheerful light.

The prisoner mourned for the ray,
That each day stayed an hour,
And cheered his life and kept in bloom,
His paltry little flower.

The flower was Hope, that flourished in
The ray, your presence dear ;
Fate was the wall that grew beyond ;
My life the prison drear.

The flower is dead, and dark and dull
Is now the prison wall :
No sunshine of your presence casts
A glory over all.

“Old Stephen seems to have given it up as a bad business,” laughed Gurney, sneeringly.

“I’ve heard it before,” put in Hunt, thoughtfully,

“the idea, at all events. Wasn’t there some Italian chap, who—”

“Yes, his name was Pic—dash it, what was it? Pic—Pic—well, something like that, said Standish.”

“By gad, but it’s pretty, Stephen,” remarked a tall man, who had hardly spoken as yet, by name Cosmo Lawson.

“Dam,” returned Stephen, politely, at which the screams of laughter rang out anew, “I say, are you fellows going to let me get into bed? It’s beastly cold here.”

“Bring him nearer the fire,” commanded the senior, “and listen to this.”

TO AN OLD CLAY PIPE.

‘Tis but a cutty,
A copper it cost;
Yet I feel somehow
A friend I have lost.

Clayey companion,
Faithful and true,
I was proud of the blackness
I’d given to you.

I’ve smoked you while skating,
Sharpest the breeze;
Returning from drilling,
Marching at ease.

“Most defective line,” put in a laughing voice; “why, hang it, it sounds like a dragoon at the manœuvres.”

“Keep quiet,” was the unceremonious reply from the reader, who continued—

Oft on the river, too,
Laid in a skiff,
I basked in the sunlight
Enjoying a whiff.

Stretched on the sand, too,
Watching the sea,
Thinking of nothing,
I puffed at thee.

Plans I projected,
In council with you,
Dreams I indulged in
That never came true.

Calming all fretfulness
Out of my soul;
Placid forgetfulness
Came from your bowl.

All things must finish,
And pipes have an end;
Your ebon bowl's broken
Too badly to mend.

Yes! Lastly I broke you,
Companion of clay;
No more shall I smoke you,
But—throw you away.

They had all remained quite silent to hear the last poem, but as Gurney's voice died away a torrent of comments broke forth.

“Old Stephen will be Poet Laureate yet,” quote one.

“By gad, but they are clever,” said a second.

“Don't look so black, old man,” cried a third;
“there's nothing to be ashamed of in them.”

“I think,” put in Hunt, “that after that we ought to let old Stephen go to bed, poor chap. After all, he got the worst of the major’s infliction.”

“I think so, too.”

“And I.”

“And I. I say, shake hands, Stephen, and don’t bear malice. They’re dencued good verses.”

Half-a-dozen hands were stretched out to grasp Stephen’s, and, by the time he was free, Captain Gurney had gone.

He did not stay out of bed very long; he snatched up the loose slips of paper off the mantel-shelf, and gathered up those scattered about the floor, tumbling them all into his drawer and locking it securely. Then he went to bed, as before and slept, not dreaming this time that Judith Scrope had married the Devil. His visions were even worse than that, for he dreamed that she had married Captain Gurney; and when he awoke he was not sure that, of the two, the latter would not be the greatest and most dire calamity: he absolutely hated the senior captain.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was no doubt whatever that Stephen Thorold, lieutenant of the 52nd Dragoons, was very much in

love with the brigadier-major's sister-in-law. That the senior captain of that regiment was in the same boat with him was a fact not generally so well known ; nevertheless it was perfectly true. At last Captain Gurney had fallen in love! not, mind you, in the "lightly-come-lightly-go" fashion, in which nine men out of ten are perpetually paying court to the sightless god, but in real, genuine, downright earnest. He had, two or three years earlier, been attracted by Mrs. St. Hilary—then Elinor Warwick—and later, he had admired Alys Lifford, sufficiently to do everything he could to prevent Patrick O'Shaughnassy from marrying her ; but for neither of these ladies had he ever felt as he did for Judith Scrope. He used to wonder sometimes what there was in the girl to make him care for her so much ? She was hardly a beauty—indeed, her beauty was chiefly of the kind known across the Channel as *du diable*. She was young and bright, had clear, laughing blue eyes and ruddy brown hair, but she really was not a beauty. Captain Gurney admitted that, and yet—and yet—those laughing eyes disturbed his slumbers quite as often as Stephen Thorold's ; and since he had known her, he had grown *almost* tired of practical joking. After all, he thought, when he left Stephen's room that night and sought his own—after all, it was but poor fun ; and he didn't know if it was not rather

beneath him to indulge in it. He would, most likely, be major before very long, and then, of course, that sort of thing would be utterly out of the question—as impossible almost as for the commander-in-chief himself. And so, he thought, as, with a great sigh, he flung himself into a chair and stared moodily into the fire, he didn't know if it would not be as well to give it up at once. It certainly was but stupid work, and lately he had found it but poor sport—that was since he had known Judith. And then Captain Gurney leaned back in his chair, and, closing his eyes, gave himself up to delicious waking dreams, dreams of the bright chesnut-haired girl that he had learned to care for, even so much that he wanted to amend his ways for her sweet sake—dreams of her, Judith Scrope no longer, but his wife—dreams of her, together with him, in foreign lands on their wedding tour—at home in the old house, where he had scarcely ever cared to go since his mother died, because the memories, which pervaded the whole place, seemed out of harmony with the life he was accustomed to lead; quiet, happy, *respectable* dreams they were, in which Judith Scrope was the leading figure.

The little travelling clock above his head rang out two sharp strokes, ere Captain Gurney roused himself. Then, unlike Stephen, he divested himself of

his clothes very deliberately, and stayed to read several much-crushed papers ere he, at length, sought his couch—and the papers were some of Stephen's poems of which he had taken possession!

When Stephen Thorold turned out of his bed the following morning, his man had set his room in something like order. Therefore, to his master's eyes, the "hay" which had been made the previous night was of a very trifling description. He looked round with an air of satisfaction, and muttered: "Not so bad; they've torn that chair-cover, though. I say, Simpson—Simp—*son*!"

"Yes, sir," Simpson answered, bustling in with two large cans filled with water.

"See Mrs. Saunders mends that chair-cover," he said; "I think that's all the damage."

"This 'ere glass vase smashed, sir," Simpson returned, pointing to an empty space on the top of the drawers, "and the piano's scratched a good deal."

"Umph! Well, there'll be the deuce to pay when Aggio see's that. Ah! well, I suppose it can't be helped."

There was no doubt of that; and Stephen Thorold was a young man of as fairly a philosophical turn of mind as may be met with now-a-days—ergo, he said no more about the mischief done in his room but set about dressing.

Five minutes later the outer door opened, and Hunt entered.

“Are you here, Stephen?” he asked, as he pushed the door open. He glanced round the empty room, and hearing the splashing of much water in the adjoining apartment, seated himself leisurely in the largest of the three easy chairs to await Stephen’s appearance. At last he came—fresh, rosy, smiling.

“Oh, it’s you, is it?” he remarked.

“Yes. I say, old man, you’re in for it, and no mistake.”

“In for what?” turning sharply round, and looking enquiringly at his comrade, with his comb suspended in the air above his head, and his curly hair all over his eyes.

“For a three weeks’ march.”

Stephen groaned aloud, and banged his comb down, with an ugly naughty word upon his lips.

“No use making a row,” laughed his friend.

“No, hang it; I only wish there was,” returned poor Stephen, in great disgust. “How do you know? Where is it to?”

“It’s to Dublin, with that draft of horses for the 4th,” he answered. “And I know, because I’ve just been down to the mess, and the major told me.”

“Why on earth, I wonder, couldn’t the colonel

have sent Osborne?" Stephen grumbled, taking up his brush again and proceeding with his toilet.

"Oh!" with a laugh, "he has got out of it nicely. Told the colonel he has a boil under his knee, and got the doctor to back him up."

"Brute," said Stephen, with a sigh. "By Jove, but I will pay him out for this."

"Can't you get up an ailment?" Hunt laughed. "Why, look at me," he returned dolefully; "a miserable, pasty-faced duffer like Osborne can always be ill on occasion; but I—why, the chief would only laugh at me."

"Well, you must make the best you can of it," his friend said, rising and taking a leisurely survey of the numerous little knick-knacks on the mantel-shelf. "I say, Stephen."

"Well."

"Has it ever occurred to you how Gurney is altered?"

"Altered! No."

"Ah! I thought you'd have seen it. I can't make out whether he's getting old, or fallen in love, or what; but, if you just think of it a moment, he is very much tamer and quieter than he used to be."

"Yes, perhaps he is," Stephen answered. "He doesn't care so much about 'drawing' fellows as he used to do. Getting past it, I should think."

But no suspicion of the truth crossed his mind. He found, when he went down to the mess, that Hunt's news was but too true. His orders were to start at nine the following morning in charge of a draft of forty-four horses and thirty-four men—the horses for the 4th at Dublin, and to return with the men by sea from Dublin to Portsmouth, and back to Colchester by rail. "It will take at least three weeks," muttered Stephen, blankly, when he had learned these details and given up a forlorn hope which had, until that moment, flourished in his breast, that, after all, Hunt's information might be but a joke.

"Cost you a pound a day," said one officer.

"Wish I was going," cried another.

"Horrid bore; the responsibility and all that," quoth a third.

"I shouldn't mind it but for the beastly sea part of it," remarked a fourth.

But Stephen took no heed of their comments; he hurried through his breakfast, and was already outside the mess when officers' call sounded. He was one of the first into the office, and, as soon as he had received his orders, asked for leave from morning stables. It was granted, as a matter of course, and Stephen rushed up to his rooms, hurrying off his uniform and dragging on plain clothes with double-quick speed.

“Hollo, Stephen, where are you off to?” cried one or two comrades who were dawdling about outside.

“Bye, bye,” Stephen shouted in reply and was off like the wind.

His way took him to the brigadier-major’s house on the Lexden Road, which he reached in an incredibly short time, ringing a peal loud enough to awaken the seven sleepers, and supplementing his efforts by a prolonged hammering at the door. He was performing in the last respect when the man flung the door open.

“Miss Scrope at home, or Mrs. Winton?” he asked, mentioning Mrs. Winton as an afterthought, just for the sake of appearances.

“The ladies have gone up to town, sir,” the man replied.

“For the day?”

“Yes, sir. They are to return by the last train.”

“Oh!—thanks.”

He left a card, though it was so early in the day, and turned away feeling dazed and queer, for upon such a calamity as this he had not for a moment counted. And yet, that two ladies should go up to town for the day was not an unusual occurrence; it was only particularly unlucky. For a moment, as he went slowly along the pretty road, he wondered whether it would be much use to go up to town after

them? No; it would be like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay, or a pearl amongst a peck of barley. No, that was out of the question; but there was one thing he could do. He might be at the station—by accident, of course—when the last train came in, and there would be no chance of missing them. Having decided upon this plan, he went more hopefully into town to do a moderate amount of shopping, necessarily of a very moderate description in Colchester, and found his way back to barracks in time for lunch. Most of the officers were already at the meal, and the moment he showed himself in the mess-room he was greeted by a volley of chaff.

“ Hallo! here’s D.C.L.,” one laughed.

Stephen looked very blank indeed. “ What the deuce is the joke of that? ” he asked.

“ I say, Stephen,” cried another, “ you won’t forget me when you get to the top of the tree? ”

“ What tree? ”

“ Stephen Thorold, D.C.L., Poet Laureate,” he laughed.

“ Oh! shut up,” Stephen cried, with great good temper, all things duly considered.

“ Are you good at impromptus, Stephen? ” asked a bald-headed captain, who, having been in the ranks, was much older than any officer at the table.

“ Pretty fair,” said Stephen, and forthwith put up

a long arm and emptied the contents of the mustard-pot over the ancient captain's hairless pate. "Of that kind at least, my friend."

Stephen was like Betty, of world-wide renown; "he knowed his man," and he disposed of Captain McKey's chaff in a more summary manner than he would otherwise probably have dared to do. For a moment the laugh turned against the Scotchman, but it surged back to its original butt immediately.

"Well," remarked the captain next in seniority to Gurney, "I've been in this regiment a good many years, and I've seen a good many changes. We've had fellows who could sketch and paint; fellows who could sing and play, or shoot and ride; but I'll be shot if we ever turned out a poet before."

"By-the-bye," exclaimed another, "how did the chief get to hear anything about it?"

Stephen looked up, the very picture of dismay. "The chief," he gasped.

"Yes, man, the chief! I heard him laughing with the major about it this morning."

"Where?"

"Oh! I was lying on the sofa in the ante-room, and they were outside."

"What did they say, Standish?" Hunt asked.

"The colonel said he understood they were very clever, and then the major—confound him—croaked

out that he thought Thorold would be better employed learning his duty instead of occupying his time in trashy sentimental verses."

"What did the chief say?"

"Oh! he laughed outright and said, 'Well, I dare say you will never waste your time that way.'"

The tide was quite turned from Stephen then, and the absent major took up every one's attention.

"I should think not, ugly brute," muttered one officer. "I never could understand how he kept civil long enough for that nice little wife of his to marry him."

"Nor I," Stephen answered. "How miserable she does look always."

"Oh! they say he thrashes her," put in the man on Stephen's right.

"Nonsense," said one or two incredulous voices.

"Fact! I've seen her wrist all finger-marks myself, though of course they mightn't be his doing; but, from the way I've seen her watching him when I've been calling or dining there, I should be inclined to believe the worst."

"I wonder she doesn't leave him."

"Nowhere to go. Don't you know who she was?"

"Not an idea."

"Her father was major of the —rd Foot, and she hasn't a relation in the world—she told me so herself."

“ Poor little soul,” said Stephen, tenderly. “ Oh ; but upon my word, the women have hard times very often ;” and then he wondered, would the time ever come when he would leave black tokens of his fingers upon Judith Scrope’s little slender white wrists ? Stephen felt very sure he would not ; but then, doubtless, no man—not even the objectionable major—starts with the fixed intention of leading his wife a life of terror and wretchedness.

Colchester is not a particularly amusing place, and the day seemed almost as long as the previous one had done. Stephen dawdled through the dull afternoon as best he could, and hailed the dinner-hour with unusual gladness ; generally he did not care much about it—one way or another. The colonel was dining that night, so he was spared any very marked chaff, and the little that went on, in a subdued tone, in his neighbourhood he did not mind. He could not help reddening a little, though, when Colonel Lifford addressed him once or twice, but since he said nothing on the subject he did not care for that very much either, and so the evening slipped over quickly and pleasantly enough—rather too quickly for Stephen, for it was nearly eleven when the colonel rose, and he was free to betake himself to the station.

He did not, naturally, spend much time in changing his clothes, and, being a good walker, was at the

station long before the arrival of the train. Well, that was a comfort! He lounged about the platform, looking at the placards posted up on the walls, consulting his watch, and thinking it not a little strange that Major Winton had not come to meet his wife and sister-in-law. Perhaps he was away; at all events, it would be all the better for him, for he would be able to see them safely home, and thus have a chance of saying what he wanted to say to Judith. He had not to wait very long, for presently the appearance of a light in the distance told him that the train was coming. The light gleamed larger, and clearer, and nearer, through the darkness and the night-gloom, and then, the train, like an insinuating monster, glided almost noiselessly up to the platform, and the passengers for Colchester streamed out. Stephen stood still and watched eagerly. There was Bernard of the Artillery, Lucy of the 200th and his wife, a few soldiers, the quartermaster of his own regiment, and a dozen or so of shabby civilians and women—and there was no Judith Scrope.

Poor Stephen was utterly dismayed. He waited until the train had taken its departure, and then he walked slowly out of the station like a man in a dream, refusing an offer of a seat in Captain Bernard's cab without thinking of what he was doing. What could he do? They must have returned by the five

o'clock train! What a fool he had been not to come up and meet that one on the chance of their having come by it! Well, he had never thought of it, and it was no use crying over that now; nor could he very well make any excuse to go to Major Winton's house at that time of night. Therefore he could do nothing but submit himself to Fate; that was what was against him. When he reached his rooms he opened his blotting book and took therefrom a sheet of paper, on which was written a little poem which had escaped the eyes of his tormentors on the previous night.

KIS MIT.

Alla ill illa,

Wah walmond vasool ila!

Fellow mortals, why complain!

When you suffer grief or pain?

Or why triumph when you gain?

Kis mit! It is destiny!

Surely as the minutes climb,

Round the mighty clock of Time,

And the hour's succeeding chime,

You fulfil your destiny.

See a man crowned with success,

Fortune ever seems to bless,

And he knows no bitterness:

He fulfils his destiny.

See a man, who, for no sin,

Ev'ry effort beaten in,

Ever fated not to win:

He fulfils his destiny.

Grieved be not then or gay,
Whether rough or smooth your way,
Take things as they come, and say,
"Kis mit! It is destiny."

What is joy or sorrow worth?
Valueless both grief and mirth;
We are puppets on this earth!
"Kis mit! It is destiny."

"I believe there's something in it," Stephen said aloud, as he laid the paper back in its hiding-place. "At all events, I've done my best to see her, and failed, so Fate must have had something to do with it. If it's for the best 'Kis mit' will keep her true until I come back. I'll run the risk of trusting her."

And so it happened that Stephen Thorold went away from Colchester without seeing Judith Scrope again, though, if he had known what a very determined rival he had in the person of Captain Gurney, it is probable that he would not so readily have left his future so trustfully to Fate! And thus also it was that he never missed the verses, which had been purloined during the scramble on the previous evening; he had thrust those left on the chimney-shelf back into his drawer, and never thought of examining them closely to see if any were gone.



CHAPTER III.

STEPHEN Thorold had gone, and then Captain Gurney had, he felt, a fair field; for, what was best of all, there was no probable, or, indeed, possible, chance of his return for at least three weeks. And what might he not be able to do in three weeks? He sauntered up to the brigadier-major's house that afternoon, and, more lucky than poor Stephen had been on the previous day, found Mrs. Winton and her sister at home. He was just in time to join them at their afternoon cup of tea, and contrived to make himself so agreeable that Mrs. Winton asked him to dine on the following evening.

And he had a good deal of chat with Judith, too, for several other people came in, and so engrossed Mrs. Winton's attention. He was very glad of that, of course, and thought Judith's blue eyes looked more irresistible than ever; he caught himself thinking wistfully, yet with great happiness, that, if only he could win them for his own, if only he could teach the bright face to brighten at his return, the soft eyes to sadden when he left them.—he thought his future would have much more real placid, lasting joy than he had ever had in the past. His past had not been happy! He was ashamed, now that he

contrasted himself with this ruddy-haired, blue-eyed girl, wearing in all her looks and words, and surely he could trust his life upon it, in her thoughts, too, “the white flower of a blameless life:” he was ashamed of his past; it was so widely apart from her’s. The last fifteen of his five-and-thirty years, he had spent to worse than no purpose. If he could have gone to sleep at twenty and never wakened up to the present day, he felt even such oblivion would have been better than his worse than wasted years.

“What are you thinking of?” Judith asked suddenly. “I am sure of something unpleasant.”

“The past,” he answered, briefly.

“Dear me,” with a laugh. “Has that been so very disagreeable?”

“It has been regretful,” said he, gravely, “and I regret it, though I never did until—*now*.”

“Oh!” she cried, lightly, “it is never any use looking back; and between you and me, Captain Gurney, I always thought it a little—a little—what shall I say? well, spiritless.”

“Your past and mine have been different.”

“How do you know?” she asked coquettishly.

Captain Gurney smiled. “I know what mine has been,” he answered, the smile about his lips deepening, “and I look at you and—*voila!*”

Some swift, subtle instinct told Judith that he was right. She knew nothing of the wild orgies, the reckless dissipation, the mad follies and sins in which his life had been spent, but she looked in his face and she saw the traces of those years' work but too plainly visible. Perhaps Captain Gurney saw that she perceived it, for he changed the subject abruptly, and they drifted away into other topics of a less personal nature, and presently Miss Scrope showed him a well-drawn caricature of the commanding officer of the 200th, which Major Winton had brought home from their mess-table the previous evening.

“I say it is incomplete,” she said, brightly; “it should have a few words or verses of explanation at the foot; but Mr. Osmond, who drew it, says he has no gift that way.”

“Let me add the foot-note,” he suggested.

“Very well. Here is a pencil, or do you care for ink?”

“This will do, thanks.” He wrote a few lines hastily beneath the sketch, and handed it to Judith for perusal. She looked half-puzzled for a moment, then began reading, in a low voice, “*Speaks short and sharp, eyes unsettled, face flushed. Alus! poor Roland. That bout last even, must have been too much e'en for thy seasoned head, or perchance the dice were unpropitious, or perchance some fair dame—but no,*

methinks you would not fret yourself for that, my philosophical Roland. But cheer up: care, thou knowest, brought a cat to an untimely end."

"Where did you get that?" the girl asked; "what is it out of?"

"Oh, it is part of a scene I wrote some years ago," the soldier answered, carelessly. "I thought I had mistaken my vocation, and ought to have been poet instead of dragoon."

"Oh, you write poetry?"

"Certainly not," with a laugh. "But in my schoolboy days I strung a few lines together, and thought them verses."

"You have not any with you, I suppose?"

"My dear young lady, most assuredly not," he returned.

"I am so fond of poetry," Judith said, dreamily; "I wish you would bring some of your verses to-morrow evening?"

"If you really insist upon it," in a deprecating tone; "but really, Miss Scrope, my poor attempts are—are not worth the trouble of reading."

"Bring them," said she, imperatively; "I shall be dreadfully disappointed if you do not."

"Then you leave me no choice," he replied, gallantly.

He betook himself back to barracks a few minutes

later as sorely puzzled as ever any man was in this world. What he should do he didn't know. He knew perfectly well that the verses he had spoken of would only make Miss Scrope laugh—being the merest doggrel, of this type—

Oh ! my heart is very sore,
For I shall never see her more,
And very often I could roar
For Mary Jane !

Oh ! I loved her very much,
And my love for her was such,
I could bear no one to touch
My Mary Jane !

My love had eyes of liquid blue,
She vowed she would to me be true,
She said it, with her head askew,
My Mary Jane !

He felt it would not do to take such an “attempt” as that for Miss Scrope's inspection. He was completely hedged, for he dared not go without them ; and where to get any fairly good original poems he did not know. Then suddenly an idea occurred to him. Ah ! why should he not copy out those verses he had taken from Stephen Thorold the other night ? Happy thought ! He would act upon it.

Act upon it he certainly did, and found his way to the Winters' house the following evening, fully prepared to undergo a searching examination from Miss Scrope on the subject of verse writing.

“I hope you have not forgotten the verses,” she said, confidentially, when he gave her his arm into dinner.

“I could not forget anything you wished,” he responded.

“Oh,” remarked Miss Scrope, a little blankly : she had not bargained for that tone of devotion. But after dinner, all the same, she demanded the poems, and, with a little show of unwillingness, Captain Gurney produced them. She took them from him and began reading, in the way she had done on the previous day, almost to herself.

CHARGE OF CHASSEURS.

The smoke cleared away as the foe was advaneing,
Their massy battalions loomed darkling and large ;
The sun on their bayonets was fitfully glancing,
As the notes of our trumpets rang out for the charge.

And Fortune, alas ! ever fickle, had left us,
And hurled us from victory into defeat ;
Of our best and our bravest black death had bereft us,
The rest of the army was beating retreat.

The Moblôts were routed, the fellows who spouted,
In terms so heroic—the ci-devant braves ;
Save the wounded and dying, the rabble were flying,
Mixed up with the line and the tawny Zouaves.

An aide-de-camp, panting, our orders had brought us,
With bloody foam flecked was his gay sabretache !
He reeled, ere our lesson he fully had taugt us,
The blood welling under his yellow moustache.

Our colonel's stern face, as he turned to address us,
Lit up with the battle-glow, lurid though wan,
“ The foe must be checked ; you perceive how they press us,
My lads : we must stop them, or die to a man.”

Miss Scrope laid the paper down with a long, long sigh.

“ I think it is perfectly lovely,” she said, at last.

“ Oh ! hardly that ! ” Captain Gurney answered, with much humility. “ Mere doggrel.”

“ I don’t see why it is always necessary for people to depreciate their own works,” she said, gravely. “ Now, if I had written that, you would have been in raptures over it.”

“ Very possibly.”

“ Then, why affect to despise it because it is your own ? I am sure if I were sufficiently clever to have written that, I should be very very proud of the children of my fancy.”

Oh ! how her sweet words of praise echoed in his heart, and made it throb on with double speed : he only wished they really were his own, but then, she would never know !

“ Give me another,” she demanded.

TO—

“ Who was that to ? ” she asked, coaxingly. Of a surety, there seemed but little chance for poor Stephen.

“ I will tell you some day,” he answered.

“ No ; tell me now.”

“ Can you not guess ? ” looking full into her blue eyes.

“ I,” with a rippling laugh. “ No, how should I be able to guess ? Well, since you *won’t* tell me, I must go on reading.”

Oh, my dearest, may you never
See a face you love grow cold ;
And contrast that growing coldness
With the smile you knew of old.

Long to make another effort,
To express the love you feel ;
And then, groaning, see the utter
Uselessness of such appeal.

Then may Time be swift to banish
All your weary weight of pain :
Time at last the wound shall conquer,
Though the scar may still remain.

“I like that even better,” said Miss Scrope, decidedly, “and I shall keep these.”

“No, no, I beg not.”

“Yes, I shall indeed,” and, as if to prove her words, she unlocked an inlaid box upon the table and put the papers away. “And now, since you have entertained me so delightfully, I am going to sing to you.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE days slipped away and wore into weeks, and the weeks glided on until they formed a month, ere Stephen Thorold returned to head-quarters. He appeared smiling and happy at mess that night, for he had arrived early in the forenoon, and had therefore had time to pay a visit to a certain villa on the Lexden Road, and where, if the truth must out at once, he had had a most satisfactory interview with

a young lady called Judith Scrope. If Stephen looked bright and happy, the senior captain was the very reverse. He greeted Stephen with a growl, scarcely touched his outstretched hand, and "shut up" every effort he made to converse with him, with scant ceremony. And poor Stephen was so very innocent and unsuspecting of the tumult which was going on in his senior's breast. He had come back from a tiresome three weeks' march, a wearisome dawdle of twenty-four hours in Dublin Bay—waiting for orders—a more wearisome voyage of four days, with fearfully rough weather, and a long railway journey back to the place where he should find his love, where he had found her. What wonder was it that, having seen her and set everything "right," he should be overflowing with kindness and *bon homie* to all his brother officers? He took all their chaff good-naturedly, as usual; he told them all about his long journey, and caused screams of laughter by the recital of his adventures, and then someone asked him if he had written any more poetry?

"Well, no, I havn't," he answered, cheerfully; "and, I say, whilst the subject is afloat, I may as well tell you that I did not write those verses you made such a fuss about just before I went away."

"Oh! by jove!" cried one.

"Who wrote them?" asked another.

“ Anyone we know ? ” said a third.

“ Well, I’m not at liberty to tell you, except that they were written by a lady,” he answered.

“ A lady ! ” They were all too much astonished to make a noise, and most of my readers will know that it takes a good deal to astonish officers of dragoons.

In spite of their efforts to discover who the author was, Stephen refused to tell them ; but presently, when Captain Gurney came up and asked him the question plainly, he gave him a plain, straightforward reply.

“ Who wrote those poems, Thorold ? ” he asked curtly.

“ Miss Scrope,” said Stephen, quietly.

Captain Gurney stood quite still for a moment, and Stephen, being like Duncan Grey of old “a lad o’Grace,” forebore to look at him at all, but confined his attention strictly to the pictures on the opposite wall.

The older man tried for a moment to think ! The events of the past month surged into his brain with painful distinctness ; how Judith had praised the poems and lifted her blue eyes with such innocent sweetness to his—how she had held him at arm’s length, yet each day drawn him on a little further and a little further—how she had—bah ! he couldn’t think of it any longer, but he rapped out two short words, which nearly sent Stephen’s gravity off the balance, and they were—“ Little Devil ! ”

THE HERO OF THE REGIMENT.

By THE AUTHOR OF "A REGIMENTAL MARTYR," "A REGIMENTAL VALENTINE,"
"A REGIMENTAL POET," &c., &c.

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN GURNEY was utterly tired of his old regiment, and had made up his mind to leave it. So long as his comfort depended upon the behaviour of his brother officers he was very well content, for all soldiers are willing to overlook practical jokes, and subalterns are compelled to do so. But sometimes the juniors have wives, and when those wives are very beautiful and very popular women, they have it in their power to make matters particularly unpleasant for any officer to whom they may have taken a dislike. However greatly an officer may be offended and annoyed by so-called jokes, even though they have been carried beyond all bounds of reason, three words will generally set everything straight and make him forget all about it; but with his wife reconciliation is not always so easily effected: if she resolutely declines to forget what is past, and cannot forgive "fun"—at the worst only intended to relieve the

tedium of dull country quarters—the unlucky offender may find his life much less pleasant than it might otherwise have been to him. Now this was precisely the box in which Captain Gurney found himself, and he did not relish the position at all. When, after dinner or ball, the men were, one and all, raving of the beauty, and the wit, and the charms of Mrs. Gerard St. Hilary or Mrs. Patrick O'Shaughnassy, not forgetting Mrs. Stephen Thorold, it was galling in the extreme to this gallant gay Lothario to be obliged to own that he had no acquaintance with any of them. When all his comrades went on Sunday afternoon to the house of one or other of those ladies, for an early cup of tea, he could not do likewise, because he had not been asked. When he met the two first in the street, (Judith was more merciful) they looked him full in the eyes without the slightest inclination of either handsome head ; he felt all his temper—and it was a passionately fierce one—surging up tumultuously within him, and he vowed bitter vengeance against the pair of them, and looked forward with intense eagerness to the day when he should have brought one or both of them to his feet, when they should acknowledge his power and atone for by-gone scorn with pleading humiliation : when those eyes which looked so straightly into his own, should droop before his in supplicating fear. Nay, I must confess, he

looked eagerly forward to the time when Gerard St. Hilary and Patrick O'Shaughnassy should find their hearts desolate ; but

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.

The day which Greville Gurney anticipated never came. Without doubt, he was handsome enough and fascinating withal, but, bless you, the man never got a chance. Elinor St. Hilary and Alys O'Shaughnassy wouldn't have him at any price . . . they both agreed that their safest plan would be to keep on the firm ground of non-acquaintance, and not trust themselves upon the perilous and extremely uncertain ocean of Captain Gurney's friendship. At last he felt he could endure life in the old regiment no longer : he was too fond of his profession to dream of leaving the army, but he made up his mind that he must exchange, when, to his unspeakable joy and satisfaction, he obtained the majority, and immediately exchanged with Major Ford of the 7th Lancers, then in India. So he turned his back upon the old set, followed only, I fear, by the regrets of his commanding officer, for he was a smart soldier, whom Colonel Lifford was sorry to lose, and Colonel Cornwallis was glad to gain. He gave a handsome piece of silver to the mess-plate, and had a grand farewell dinner given to him, at which, if my

reader had been present, he might reasonably have supposed that the officers were, one and all, convinced that the hope and the prestige of the regiment were departing from them in the person of Greville Gurney, and yet they knew—and, what was worse, he knew—that they were all very glad to be rid of him. But his advent into the 7th was eagerly expected, more especially by the chief, for smart officers, like good-looking curates, are at a premium, so he felt that the change was all for the best.

He had never thought, or indeed intended, to go to India; but, after all, he rather liked the idea. The 7th had only some three years to remain in India, and, by the time he returned, he could set about finding a wife in downright good earnest.

However, before the good ship sighted the Rock, the idea had entered his brain and taken very firm root there, for, curiously enough, he found amongst the passengers Mrs. Cornwallis, the wife of his new colonel, and her sister, Miss Bannister.

Violet and Dorothea Bannister were co-heiresses, and had been left orphans at a very early age. In appearance they were not much alike, for Violet, the elder by two years, was fair, with a gentle, saint-like expression of countenance, and large limpid eyes, of so deep a blue that her fanciful young mother had insisted upon her being called—Violet.

“ You know, Jack,” she had said to her husband, when he demurred a little, wishing himself to call the child after her, “ we can give the next one my great mouthful of a name,” and so the child was christened Violet, later shortened into Vi; but when the next one came there was no question of dispute about her name, for the young mother lay in a darkened chamber above, while a grave-faced clergyman performed the ceremony of baptism in haste, fearing that the morsel of humanity, whose tiny life had cost so dear a price, would die in his arms ere it was concluded.

But the child did not die: the elder Dorothea, with all her strong affections and her bright hopes of life, passed away; but the younger one, with her few hours' hold upon existence, struggled on and lived.

About her name there had been no question, but by it she was never called. Mr. Bannister could not bear the sound of it, and was eagerly glad when, somehow, the tiny, dark-haired, dusky-eyed child came to be known in the household as Floss. So Floss she was called, and Floss she remained, long after her father had followed his young wife across the dark river, and after Vi had been three years married to Colonel Cornwallis of the 7th Lancers.

When Vi had married, at twenty, to go to India immediately—for she had met Colonel Cornwallis whilst on leave—Floss had not been in very robust health,

and the doctors had advised her not accompanying her sister just then. She therefore went to live with the aunt, with whom they had spent all their holidays, and who divided her time equally between Paris, London, and Scarborough. The three years had passed in a perfect whirl of pleasure for Floss, but she had not followed her sister's example and entered upon the holy estate of matrimony. Mrs. Garth was in no hurry to lose the girl who made her life so daily, hourly bright, whose fascinating ways made her house the most sought after domicile in whatever town they happened to be living; and so it happened that when, after a few hours' illness, Mrs. Garth was taken away from the pleasures she loved so dearly, Floss was completely left alone. She had no relatives but the Cornwallises, and she telegraphed to Vi to come, if possible, to settle their aunt's affairs, and take her back to India with her.

Thus it happened that, after a three months' sojourn in England, Mrs. Cornwallis was returning to her husband, taking Floss with her. And then everything seemed *couleur de rose* to Greville Gurney's eyes. Surely no man ever went that voyage with a more contented heart than his! He had nothing to do, nothing to worry him, no disagreeable, handsome subalterns' wives to annoy him with their airs and graces; he had no temptations to indulge in his old favourite

pursuit of practical joking, and he had at all hours of the day Floss Bannister to watch and talk to. And, of course, it was pleasant for the sisters to have the major of their own regiment travelling with them : they made pleasant little excursions wherever they stopped ; they had a dozen little innocent jokes of their own—that is to say, strictly among themselves—which they did not share with the other passengers, and the trio enjoyed life immensely. It was *couleur de rose* for all of them. Vi, who was going back to her husband, and to seeing whom she counted the days and almost the hours, used to sit idly under a huge white umbrella, thinking of little else save the stern, bronzed face, with its well-waxed dark moustaches, which was to her as no other on the whole earth ; and Floss, always restless, always with some employment, flirting with Greville Gurney, who, for his part, was so supremely, calmly happy, that he almost wished the voyage would last for ever.

But it did not : in time it came to an end, and they reached Bombay, where they found Colonel Cornwallis waiting for them. It may readily be imagined that during the days which followed Captain Gurney's opportunities of seeing Floss Bannister were not lessened : he opened his eyes in astonishment at the marvellous way in which the chief's little wife bloomed out and expanded after they landed ; he could hardly

believe it was the same woman. He had wondered during the voyage if she could really be Miss Bannister's sister; they seemed so different: the one all fire and vivacity, the other so languidly indifferent to all subjects save that of reaching Bombay. But now that he saw her under what Floss called "favourable circumstances," he was fairly dumb with amazement. It was as if a little sickly bud, with seemingly not sufficient strength to bloom, had suddenly been transformed into a gorgeous rose, with all her velvet-like petals, her fragrance and her many graces set forth for the benefit of all beholders: he wondered if Floss would ever love him like that? He did not know; he was not sure. He thought she seemed brighter and more sparkling when he was near her; he fancied her great dark eyes lighted up with more than their usual radiance when he approached her; he tried hard to persuade himself that he was *quite* sure she loved him, but he could not altogether succeed. He had made several mistakes upon that same subject lately, and, somehow, he had not heart enough to put it to the test and have done with it. He haunted the colonel's bungalow until the chief suggested to his wife that Gurney had better take lodgings with them altogether, but he got no further with Floss. Try as he would, he could not induce her to look at anything in a serious light: if ever he

approached, no matter how cautiously, the topics of loneliness or marriage, Floss immediately opened out upon what she called her "views."

"I don't think I quite believe in marriage, Major Gurney," she said one day, when he had expressed his envy of a fellow-officer, who was just entering the holy state. "It's all very well for *men*, but for us poor women!—why, it is neither more nor less than giving up a kingdom to become a slave. Now, just take me for an example! I have now between twenty and thirty adorers—humble, abject adorers."

"Yes, I know," muttered Major Gurney between his teeth. There were just seven and twenty, without counting himself.

"Not that I consider them very delightful," Floss continued, with gravely pursed-up mouth. "In fact, strictly between you and me, they are rather a nuisance, so many of them. But then, supposing I was to marry one of them—why, he might turn out like the husband of a friend of mine. What do you think he does?"

"Beats her perhaps," suggested the major.

"*Much* worse," Floss cried, energetically—she had not been in India long enough to become languid. "She is five and twenty, a gentlewoman by birth and education, the mother of two children, and he *never gives her a penny!*"

“ By Jove ! ” muttered the major, in astonishment ; “ but perhaps she has money of her own ? ”

“ Not a farthing.”

“ But how does she dress herself ? ”

“ Oh, when she cannot do without a dress any longer, he goes and buys her one, and he pays her dress-maker’s bill himself. I have seen him buy six pair of gloves for himself and *one* for her ; and once, when I was staying there, he went himself to pay a woman who had been helping in the kitchen,” she ended, indignantly.

“ What a mean hound ! ” ejaculated Major Gurney, in very real tones of condemnation.

The mischievous laughter in Floss Bannister’s dusky eyes deepened, and the indignant ring in her voice grew more pronounced.

“ Ah ! but I told that story once to a man who wanted to marry me,” she laughed, “ and he used those very words, ‘ What a mean hound ! ’ I must admit that they sounded so real that he completely took me in, but I heard not long afterwards that during the nine years he was married—for he was a widower—he never once bought *his* wife a gown, and the only decent dresses she had, her mother gave her ! ”

Within himself Major Gurney groaned. It was no use arguing with Floss any further, he knew ; she had triumphed. Yet he laughed ! He had, he was

perfectly aware of it, many objectionable points, but meanness was not one of them. He laughed half a dozen times that day at the idea of his paying Floss's bills, and doling out a pair of gloves at a time. He thought it would be rather nice than otherwise to have those coaxing eyes up-lifted to his, that coaxing mouth teasing for a new dress or a set of furs, to hear her winning tones saying persuasively, "Greville, *do* buy me that bonnet."

And yet to him there was something absolutely appalling in the idea of a pretty woman not being able to have as many gowns and bonnets as she required. He should like the coaxing eyes, the coaxing mouth, and the winning tones dearly enough, but he would prefer to hear them say, "Greville, *do* take me for a drive," or "Darling, *please* don't stay away a moment longer than you can help," to "Greville, *do* buy me that bonnet."

When a man is in love it does not take much to put him into a perfect paradise of bliss—only about as much as is required to throw him into a fever of unrest and misery. Major Gurney that evening was happy—very happy. He went to bed and slept soundly; he did not often do that. He was not bitten once by *anything* during the whole night, and he dreamt that Floss Bannister had come and put her soft arms round his neck and said, "Love me,

Greville." Poor fellow, it was like falling from Heaven into the nethermost torment, when he woke to find his bearer's black face peeping through the curtains, and "Four o'clock, Sahib," sounding in his ears. Why it was an absolute insult to Floss that a wretched Hindoo should recall her to his mind.

As usual, during his morning ride, he fell in with the Cornwallises and Miss Bannister, and, for a wonder, the latter was unattended.

"How grave you look," she remarked, when they were riding quietly abreast, "Had a bad night?"

"Quite the contrary—an unusually good one," he replied.

"Then what is the matter?" she persisted.

"Oh! I've been thinking of what you said yesterday," he returned gravely.

"What about?"

"About getting married."

An expression of intense amusement came into her eyes, as quickly followed by a certain tenderness, which, if Major Gurney had noticed, would have set everything straight between them; but unfortunately he did not, for Floss's face was bent almost to her saddle.

"And what have you been thinking about?" she asked at length.

"Well, of course, what you told me was very bad,

very despicable," he answered, "and a fellow, who behaves like that to his wife, ought to be sent to Coventry; but, still, there's something to be said on our side. Now, I know a lady, Miss Bannister, who never speaks to her husband, if she can possibly help it."

"Perhaps he deserves it," Floss suggested.

"Very likely, only that is hardly the way to help him to grow better, is it?"

Floss pulled her horse up sharply. "Don't speak to me in that way," she cried; "I'm not anyone's wife, thank goodness—if I were, I should behave myself properly; but don't bully me for some one else's misdoings." And then, like two silly children, they burst out laughing, and rode on again. The major, however, had something to say, and he meant to say it.

"And I once knew a lady who spent just five times as much as her husband could afford. He was a barrister; and to see the poor chap toiling and slaving and working to provide things for her, without thanks even. Oh! by George! but it did make my blood boil. She used to do all sorts of things, too, that he didn't like; and once, she proposed a mad freak, which I said I was certain her husband would never permit.

"'Permit,' she laughed. 'Pooh!—I have a hold over that man.'"

“Hateful wretch!” cried Floss, passionately. “I should like to marry her to Winny’s husband—he would let her see! Hateful wretch!”

But, still, although he had gained a victory over Floss, it cannot be said that Major Gurney’s wooing throve apace. As if to make up for the serious conversations they had indulged in, Floss, for a few weeks, gave Major Gurney but little of her society. Of the seven and twenty adorers, each had a turn—such a turn, too, that with every one a match was predicted; and then one or two new ones arrived on the scene. Floss polished them all off. She was very particular, too, to carry on her warmest flirtations just under the major’s nose, driving him thereby to the very verge of desperation.

And then the Cornwallises obtained leave, and went to Simla, from whence he heard plentiful accounts of Floss’s doings, and, shall I dare to say it, misdoings? Poor Major Gurney, he railed at the fate which would not give him leave; at the utterly unjust and unequal way in which the little blind god distributes his favours; and thus March and April slipped away; and then he had fresh cause for grumbling, for just as the Cornwallises returned, an attack of fever laid him on the sick-list, and another fortnight passed before he saw her.

And, when at length he was able to crawl over to

the colonel's bungalow, there were rumours afloat, which put such thoughts as favour and marriage out of his head, rumours which gave the officers grave faces and the wives fearful hearts, for the chiefest of them was—MUTINY.

CHAPTER II.

ALL English people know the history of that fearful struggle by heart—some by the brotherhood of nationality, others by bitter heartaches and weary blanks in the family circle, which may be filled up never more. And there are not a few who can look back to those weary months, when they stood cheek by jowl with grim death, with famine, torture, and even dishonour in his ghastly train. The words “Cawnpore,” “Delhi,” and “Lucknow,” are sufficient to bring to our minds scenes and details which sickened us to read, and which sicken us now to recall to our remembrance. How gently-born, delicately-nurtured women and little children went through fearful privations and hardships during that awful time, only to end by finding themselves widowed or orphans. How thousands won for themselves a glorious crown of martyrdom, cruelly as did ever saints of old. How parents saw their little

innocent babes murdered before their eyes while waiting for their own turn to come. Husbands shot their wives to save their honour—the tender wives whom they had brought from the safe shelter of their English homes. How, even after that, we are told, they died praying to the end—died, seeing resistance useless, as only the English aristocrat can die—and are not the English of the truest aristocracy, inasmuch as they can fight like tigers and die without a murmur?

Colonel Cornwallis's first anxiety was to get his wife and sister as much out of harm's way as possible, and to the comparative safety of Simla he decided to send them, but, when the arrangements were all completed, an obstacle, unthought of before, presented itself in the shape of Mrs. Cornwallis's consent. He had taken that for granted. The idea of gentle, obedient Vi dreaming for one moment of setting up her will in opposition to his had never occurred to him. Vi, who lived and breathed and had her very being ~~in~~ him! Vi, who drooped and faded like a flower torn from the parent stem, if parted from him even for a day. That Vi should flatly refuse to go he had never anticipated, yet that was what she did.

“I won't go,” she said, decidedly.

“Neither will I,” announced her sister.

Colonel Cornwallis fairly groaned. That Floss should show her will was nothing new, or that she

should follow her sister's lead, once in a way. If Vi had stormed and cried, had begged him, with sobs and tears, not to send her away, he would, he knew, have prevailed, but Vi did nothing of the sort. She lifted her great violet eyes boldly to his, she folded her hands placidly, and she said, "I won't go."

"Neither will I," said Floss.

"But my dearest," the colonel replied, "God only knows to what this may lead. In Simla you will be fairly safe. Think of my anxiety, if I see you here-suffering and am unable to help you, think of my sorrow, if—if you are wounded, if—Oh, Vi, my darling, you must go! I shall at least have the comfort of knowing that you are safe. I insist upon your going."

"No," she replied, firmly, "I will not go. I have never once crossed your will since our marriage day. I cross it now by refusing to obey you. It is no use insisting, I refuse to obey. I took you," she continued, with a sob in her voice, "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, till death us do part! This is my place, and here I remain."

"But, great heavens!" cried the major, who was present, "you may be killed! We cannot tell what the consequences may be. Floss"—stepping forward and taking her hand—"Floss, persuade her to do as we wish."

But Floss turned upon him with an indignant flash in her dark eyes, and flung the hand from her. "Do you think we Bannisters are cowards?" she cried, passionately. "If there is danger, we can share it; privation, we can try to lighten it; death, we can die like christians." And so they gave in, and the two brave girls won the day, but not before Colonel Cornwallis tried once again.

"Supposing I am killed, Vi," he said gravely, "I shall die with the agony of knowing that you are left at the mercy of these savages. Will you add that misery to my difficulties?"

"No, Bruce," she answered, "if we should be taken, I shall find death come sweetest from your hand, out of the pistols which I have loaded and polished for you so often! Yes, in that case, to save me greater torture, you will shoot me—it will be over in a moment! If you are killed, I can trust your officers to protect me, and, failing them," with a smile, "I shall have quite sufficient courage to send the bullet home myself." And so the day was won!

The story went from mouth to mouth, bringing tears to the eyes of the rough stalwart troopers, courage to the drooping hearts of their wives, who had not had the chance of escape, and comfort to the souls of the two men, who knew now what was the depth of those brave, loving, faithful hearts. They were glad then

that their entreaties had not prevailed, for the two gentle girls had not stayed to become a burden and a hindrance. Their time was fully occupied, tending the sick and wounded, cheering the brave little band—which grew daily smaller and smaller—going fearlessly amid shot and shell on their rounds of hope and mercy, the sisters won the passionate love and admiration of every man, woman and child in the garrison. It was Vi, who gave her last tin of milk for the sick child of a private's wife; it was Vi, whose breast pillow'd the dying head of trooper and officer alike; Vi, who wrote down loving messages of farewell, to be given if she should live through the rebellion; it was to please Vi, that wounded men hushed their groans and terrified women tried to be brave. And Floss, what of her? Of the nursing and the cooking and the washing she did her share, but there was one duty she took upon herself and never failed in. The chaplain had enough upon his hands in burying the dead and helping Vi to comfort the dying, more than twice in the day, he could not visit the out-posts. Floss went almost every hour! How the men looked for her coming. With her pale, pale face, and her dark eyes, with her dark silky hair cut close to her head, partly on account of the terrible heat, partly to save time and trouble; with her gown, which had once been white, but alas! was now all stained and

yellow, and with her brave heart, open to all alike now, she seemed to them like some glorious angel, for surely it was the light of Heaven, which shone upon her face. Sometimes she brought her Bible and read a few verses, sometimes she sang a hymn, but more often she knelt simply down and repeated “Our Father” in her clear ringing tones, ending “The Lord bless us and keep us.”

She would bring to one man news of his sick wife, to another tidings of his wounded comrade, to all courage and comfort, and still she did not shirk her woman’s work.

And then the labour which fell upon her grew heavier, for Colonel Cornwallis was grievously wounded. Vi, who had worked like a very slave, left much of her work in the hospital to Floss ; she could scarcely be torn from her husband’s side, and so Floss worked harder than ever. Her face grew paler and more wan, her eyes more haggard, her gown more torn and yellow, and upon the little hands, which had once been so white and soft, the traces of work became more apparent, and the enemy crept closer and closer. As her work in the garrison grew heavier, so did her self-imposed labour of love at the out-posts and fortifications diminish, for, with almost every day, she had fewer to visit. Every day brave, bronzed, bearded faces were missing—faces that had brightened at her

coming ; eyes that had lighted up with tenderest love for her were now closed in the sleep of death ; lips that kissed the little work-worn hands gratefully were silenced for ever. She missed them, with a bitter heartache, and dared not trust herself to think which face might be gone when she came again ; but she bore up bravely through it all.

In what the defenders of the garrison were pleased to term safety, the misery was greater. No one had time for grief : widows saw their dear ones carried away, but they might not sit down and weep ; there was more work than could be done waiting for their hands. Even Vi, having managed to get her husband a room alone in the little bungalow which stood in the compound of the one they had occupied, but which now formed the hospital, left him a good deal, that she might lighten her sister's load ; and so the time went on. Amongst others, the chaplain was killed, so then Floss was the only comforter of the defenders. They watched, anxiously enough, the pale face growing paler, the circles round the dark eyes deepening ; they noted the least falter in the gentle voice, which had not much ring left in it, which had neither time nor strength for reading or for hymns, which now only gave utterance to those two short prayers,

Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done.

Only that and “ The Lord bless us and keep us.”

CHAPTER III.

AT last Greville Gurney had given in, not from wounds, not sunstroke, not from malady of any kind —only from sheer fatigue, from overpowering sleep.

Some of the men lifted him on to a mattress and carried him to the first room of the hospital. Just as they turned away Floss came out of an inner apartment with scared eyes and a single word upon her lips—“Wounded?”

“No, no, Miss, darlin’,” answered one of them; “only dead beat he is; an hour of sleep’ll do him all the good in the world.”

“Ah!” with a great sigh of relief, then leant her head against the wall and closed her eyes. The big Irishman looked at her in silence for a moment.

“I’d just go an’ lie down me-self, if I was you, Miss, dear,” he said: “at last you’ll be wearin’ yer-self out, and we’ll have never a soul to say a word of comfort to us.”

“I’m afraid I must,” she answered; “I’d go and lie down by the colonel, only I’m so tired.”

The big lanceer picked her up like a baby, and ran across the compound with her, taking her right into the chief’s room, not a little to Vi’s dismay, who feared she was hurt.

“Miss Floss is just tired out, mem,” he announced, “and we’ve frightened her to death by carrying in the major, who’s dead beat.”

“I thought he would have to give in,” Mrs. Cornwallis said, as the man retired. “Lie down here, Floss, and I will go and see after things.”

“Could you go round the posts?” Floss asked, imploringly. “They will be expecting me, and it wouldn’t take you long: just the ‘Our Father’ and the blessing, Vi.”

“Yes, I’ll do it,” and then she went away.

And so the two brave souls slept heavily. Floss within sight of the wounded colonel, and Greville Gurney on the floor of the hospital; and while they slept, the enemy crept a little nearer, forced the defenders back, and covered the space between the two bungalows with their fire. At the very first shot Vi Cornwallis sped back to her husband’s side, just as Floss, with dazed eyes and scattered senses, sat up on her bed, wondering what the noise meant.

“What is it, Vivi?” she asked.

“I think the end has come,” she said calmly; “let me have your hand, Bruce, darling.” All her bravery, all her courage rose to the surface then. She sat down quietly beside her husband, with one hand in his, a revolver in her right hand, and a second lying ready loaded on the bed.

“ *What’s* that ? ” Floss cried, clasping her hands together.

There was no answer : a shell came through the roof with a crash, while from the opposite building rose a wild shriek of “ Fire ! ”

“ What’s that ? ” Major Gurney asked, starting up from his hardly-earned repose.

A young officer, just entering the room, answered him hastily, “ A shell has sent the colonel’s room to smash, and they’re all there ! ”

Greville Gurney sprang from his couch without a moment’s delay, and ran as fast as possible round to the side of the hospital, opposite to which the Cornwallises’ room was. A little group of soldiers and ladies were standing within the shelter, one of the women sobbing unrestrainedly.

“ Good heavens ! are you going to leave them there ? ” Greville cried passionately : “ a wounded man and two helpless women in a burning house ! ”

“ The roof has fallen, major,” one of the men replied, “ and there is a sharp fire between us.”

So there was : they could watch the bullets whistling and whirling through the air between them and the Cornwallises’ hut. As the man spoke several officers came running to the spot : “ The colonel’s room ? ” one asked.

“ Yes, I’m going,” the major answered.

“So am I,” and “So am I,” cried the others.

“No, no; I’ll have no married men,” Greville cried decidedly. “Maude, you may come.”

As he spoke he caught up a mattress, and dashed straight across the open space, followed by young Maude, both of them reaching the verandah of the opposite bungalow in safety. There, under the verandah’s scanty shelter, they found the two women, who, between them, had managed to drag Colonel Cornwallis out of the rapidly-burning building. Floss uttered a glad cry, as the two men ran round the corner; little Mrs. Cornwallis breaking into a passionate torrent of tears.

“Maude, you are less than I,” Major Gurney said, hurriedly, when they found the ladies were still unhurt: “take Mrs. Cornwallis; she is the least. Put your arms round Maude’s throat, Mrs. Cornwallis, and try your best to keep behind the shelter of the mattress.”

“I won’t leave Bruce,” the little woman announced: “you must take him first.”

“Nonsense: do as we tell you,” imperatively.

“I won’t,” sitting down by her husband and taking his hand.

“You must,” said the major firmly. “Colonel, will you use your influence?” bending over him tenderly. “Mrs. Cornwallis objects to leaving you, but we will come back for you, when they are in safety.”

“Go, my darling,” said the colonel faintly, “but kiss me first.”

Vi bent over him to do his bidding, and did what was, perhaps, the best thing she could possibly do under the circumstances—fainted away.

“That’s better,” muttered Greville. “Pick her up, Maude, and run off with her: stay, have your mattress so,” tearing a long hole in the cover for the young man to pass his arm through.

“Now, Floss, trust yourself perfectly to me.”

“No, no; I’m heavy,” she answered, “I can run, you’ve no idea how fast; and I’ll slip this long skirt off, and surely between us we can carry Bruce across.”

“Nonsense; I must take you myself,” he answered.

“Well, then, here is the mattress Bruce was on when we dragged him out; let me take that and go by myself; I’m not afraid. Oh! Major Gurney, what is the matter with Bruce—is he dead?”

“Fainted,” he returned briefly, “all the better for my purpose. If you’re not going to take that skirt, I will use it as a sling, and regularly hang him round my neck, so;” then, having slipped the long muslin skirt under the colonel’s knees, and tied a knot ready to slip over his head, he turned to Floss: “I must see you off first, darling.”

“I am ready when you tell me.”

Major Gurney arranged the mattress to the best

advantage, and led her to the corner. “Floss,” he said, hoarsely, taking her by the hand and bending his face down to hers, “will you kiss me before you go? and if I get hurt—for I shall have a good weight to carry,” looking doubtfully at the unconscious form beside them, “I shall know if you cared or not.”

“Yes, dear,” Floss answered, simply, holding up her face to his.

“Now go,” he said, quietly, “go at once.”

Floss Bannister turned her soft, dark eyes upon his in silence, and, with that one look, ran boldly round the corner, and was lost to view.

“Alone!” cried a dozen eager voices as she gained the opposite verandah. “Why, where’s Gurney?”

“Bringing the colonel,” Floss replied, at which poor Vi’s tears broke out anew—tears of gratitude those.

“Where’s Mr. Maude?” Floss asked, looking round.

“Shot in the shoulder: Dr. Moss is attending to him.”

“All my fault,” Vi sobbed.

“Hush! here he is,” as Greville Gurney left the shelter of the opposite building, staggering under the heavy weight of the still unconscious colonel, yet keeping to his task bravely, and holding his slender cover as best he could between them and the enemy’s fire.”

“He’ll do it!” cried one.

“ Somebody run out and help him,” said another; “let me go.”

“No, no, Jack,” cried an anxious wife, holding him back.

“Let him alone,” put in another, with his arm in a sling; “he’ll manage it best alone.”

“He’s shot!” Floss screamed; “I saw it. Oh! I tell you, I saw it. I saw him stagger.”

“No, no, it was the chief’s weight.”

“I don’t know; he’s very shaky—now—put your hand out; I’ve only one. Ah! here he is. Bravo! well done!” as the major reached the shelter, and a dozen hands were ready to relieve him of his burden. “Hold up a moment, man, till we get it off,” trying, with his left hand, to free the major’s throat from the muslin sling.

“I can’t,” he gasped, sinking on his knees.

“Hollo!” forgetting his shattered arm in his effort to hold him up! “You’re not hurt, surely?”

“I’m done for,” Greville said, faintly; “did she get in safe?”

Mrs. Cornwallis, with an ingratitude for which she may surely be forgiven, had flown to her husband’s side, and left his deliverer unheeded; but Floss, with a face so white and eyes so filled with pain, that the little group stood aside to let her pass, came swiftly beside him, and lifted his head upon her arm.

“ I am here,” she said, softly ; “ the doctor will be with us in a moment.”

“ No use, dear ; it’s all up,” he gasped : “ got a bullet through my lungs.”

“ Don’t talk,” she said, imperatively.

“ Make—no difference, and there are some things I must say. Floss, if all this trouble had never been, would my love have been of any good ? Would you have ever loved me ? ”

For one moment she raised her eyes to the sorrowful sympathetic faces round them, then she answered clearly,

“ If it pleases God to take you from me, I will come to you in heaven—Floss Bannister still.”

“ Thank you, dearest. No, don’t touch me, doctor ; no use.”

“ My dear fellow, we cannot tell that till I have looked at you,” the surgeon said, kindly.

“ No use ; it will be over in a minute or two now. Floss, if ever you come across any of the old 52nd tell them I am sorry now I did not make myself more to them ; that I thought of them all kindly at the last.”

“ Yes, I’ll tell them,” Floss answered, in a strangely far-off sounding voice.

“ I dare say they’ve forgotten all the old quarrels now,” he said, faintly ; then, after a long silence, “ Still there, Floss ? ”

“ Still here, darling.”

He smiled at her words, and felt blindly for her hand. His breathing grew more laboured, his face more deadly pale. Then a sudden glad light flooded into his blue eyes, the smile on his lips deepened, and he tried to speak again. But the effort only ended in a crimson stain upon the kerchief Floss held to his lips, followed by a sigh and a shiver, and Greville Gurney lay dead, with his face turned up to the brilliant Indian sky, surely one of the grandest heroes that ever Queen or regiment boasted of. And beside him lay Floss Bannister, in the blessed unconsciousness, which sometimes comes to lull our keenest agonies, for a little while, to rest.

* * * *

It was months later that Geoffry Maude, writing to Stephen Thorold, gave, at Floss Bannister’s desire, Greville Gurney’s last message to his old comrades, and Mrs. Stephen, with tears in her soft eyes, read the letter to such of the regiment as had assembled in her drawing room that Sunday afternoon, for tea and chat. It was received in silence, more than one hardy soldier turning away to hide the emotion he was ashamed to show. Alys O’Shaughnassy had hidden her face against her husband’s arm, but little Mrs. St. Hilary looked up bravely, though there was

an ominous glitter of tears in her large eyes, and a piteous quivering about her mouth.

“I always liked him,” she said, trying hard to steady her voice, “I *always* liked him, and I’m sorry I bore malice so long. So are you, Alys, I know; but he was a gentleman and a brave soldier, and he will have forgiven us. He has come out in his true character—that of a chivalrous hero, and now that he has gone where mistakes and resentment have no place, he will surely know how deeply we regret him, how any ill-feeling there may have been between him and us is blotted out by the glorious way in which he has shown us all how duty may be done!” And then the little woman broke into a passionate torrent of tears.



THE ORDEAL BY PAINT;

OR, MY FIRST DAY IN THE REGIMENT.

“HERE he comes!”

“By gad, so he does! Hurrah! Some sport to-night.”

“Looks rather pale, doesn’t he?”

“Yes, and will want a good deal of setting up, too.”

“Poor devil! I pity him.”

As I was not at all afflicted—in that instance I might have said blessed—with deafness, these were a few of the remarks I could not help hearing, as I drove up to the officers’ mess of the cavalry barracks at Colchester, where I had come to join the regiment, to which I had been gazetted a couple of months before.

Quite unwittingly, I had chosen a very poor time for presenting myself. “Mid-day stables” were just over, and almost all the officers of the regiment were waiting about the verandah till luncheon should be ready. They were none of them in very amiable tempers; for they had just heard in the office that

a letter had come down for them to hold themselves in readiness to march to the autumn manœuvres at Aldershot, and Aldershot is, as most people know, a spot no cavalry officer rejoices to find himself near, even when there are no manœuvres going on.

Anything more uncomfortable than were my feelings that morning could not be easily imagined. I had never met my regiment before. I knew none of the men, and I was quite at a loss to know to whom I must address myself. However, I was compelled to act; and stumbling out of the cab, with my heart in my throat and great beads of perspiration breaking out upon my forehead, I stood for a moment while my future comrades inspected me, as if I were a polo pony for sale.

My hesitation lasted but an instant. I chose my man, an elderly, rather good-looking officer, with a bald head and well-waxed moustache; so, with a ghastly grin, I blurted out,

“I’ve come to join.”

“Oh, have you?” said he, carelessly, and with an expression of intense amusement on his face? “Your name’s Winter, I suppose? Oh, all right. Come along with me, and I’ll introduce you to the colonel. I think you have not met him yet?”

“No,” I answered, beginning to feel a little more at my ease.

“Wait a moment; I’ll just make you acquainted with these fellows first.”

This terrible ordeal over, I was hustled off by my elderly friend to be presented to the colonel, whom we found sitting in the office with his adjutant making arrangements for the coming manœuvres.

“I’ve brought Mr. Winter to see you, sir. He’s come to join,” said my guide.

“Ah, how are you?” said the colonel. “I’m very glad to see you; for we’re rather short of subalterns, and every addition is a great help. Have you got your uniform and that sort of thing? I hope you’ll like your work. Are you fond of riding?”

I answered modestly that I was, but I was afraid my experience in that line was rather limited. As I spoke, a few riding school anecdotes began to crop up in my mind; for, during the two last months, every man I had met seemed to consider it his duty to impress upon me the fact, that a riding-school is neither more nor less than a second *inferno*.

“Brought any hunters down with you?”

“No, sir.”

“Umph! A pity! This is a fair hunting district. However, those are little additions easily made, and I’ve no doubt you’ll soon fall into the ways of the regiment. You’ll find your brother-officers quite ready to help you in anything so far as sport is concerned.”

Of a truth I did; for as soon as it became known that I was anxious to buy a hunter, there was scarcely an officer in the regiment who was not anxious to sell me one, "perfectly sound, and quite good enough to win a steeplechase."

My interview with the colonel over, I was taken by my elderly friend to have lunch. On the way to the mess-room we met an officer, who seemed to me very old to be still in the army.

"Here's old Muggins, the riding-master," said my guide, whom I afterwards found was called "the Fossil," on account of his antique appearance. "Well, Muggins, this is Mr. Winter, just joined."

"Ho!" said Mr. Muggins. "Glad to see you. Fond of riding? Hey?"

I returned the same answer that I had given to the colonel on that subject, and Mr. Muggins grinned—a grin which somehow reminded me of a cat playing with a mouse.

"Ho, my boy," said he; don't know much about it, don't you? Well, we'll soon tickle you hup a bit. Hey, Moore?"

"Yes, I daresay," in rather a bored tone. "Come along, Winter. Beastly old cad, Muggins!" he burst out, as soon as we were out of earshot. "Always sneaking about and getting the young chaps into trouble, except they happen to be willing to bribe him."

At lunch I was posted next to a young subaltern of about six months' service, who, having himself just got over the rough part of joining, thought it his bounden duty to "swagger" over me. He was a babyish-looking, flaxen-haired cornet, with about as much hair on his upper lip as you might find upon that of a boy of twelve. He went—as I very soon heard, in spite of my fright—by the name of "the Boy," occasionally varied by that of "the Brat."

"Ah! which is your county?" drawled this youngster, quite affecting the old soldier.

"Devon," said I, trying in vain to swallow a lump of cutlet which had found its way into my mouth; how, I was really too much excited to know, for I was painfully aware every eye in the room was upon me.

"Ah! any hounds down there?"

"Oh yes. I think so," I stammered, being in too much of a "funk" to know, or rather remember, whether there were or not.

"Ah!" said my young cornet; and there our conversation ended, and I was thus enabled to hear a little of what was going on at the other end of the room; for two or three fellows, who had finished their lunch, had left the table and were standing in a group on the hearthrug.

"I should like to buy that chap at my valuation,

and sell him at his own," said one. "I'm rather hard up, and a profit might help me a bit."

"What a rum way the young beggar pronounces his *h's*!" said a second, taking no notice whatever of the previous remark.

"Ah!" put in a third, "yes, poor devil! Probably he's only just learned them."

"Not much to look at, is he?" said the first one, following up his own train of thought.

It may easily be imagined that these remarks did not tend to cure my extreme nervousness, which was evidently taken for "swagger."

After I had finished, or pretended to finish, some lunch, during which I managed to capsize a tumbler of beer half into my plate and half over the table, I was shown my room by the boy of tender years, who, being junior, was told off to look after me and set me straight a bit.

My room proved to be about thirteen feet square by eleven high, and there I found two men busily engaged in unpacking my furniture, which had been sent down from town the day before.

Amongst a great number of deficiencies I found I had forgotten to buy sheets for my bed; but, luckily, one of the men, who was servant to another officer, managed to borrow a pair for me until I could get some sent up from the town.

In course of an hour or two my room was put into something like order; and, just as the men were leaving, I asked how my luggage had got there, and who had paid for my cab. They told me that they had done so, having rescued my boxes from a lot of young officers, anxious, I daresay, to discover where I had bought my uniform, belts, boots, and, indeed, everything I possessed.

In my gratitude for their thoughtfulness I inquired how much they had paid the cabman, magnanimously intending to double it when I repaid them. The price they named, however, entirely precluded the possibility of this; in fact, it was so large that it would, I thought, have been sufficient to buy the cab itself, horse, man and all, out and out. One of the men informed me that he had been ordered to look after me, until I had got a servant of my own, and that he would return at half-past seven to dress me for dinner. As there was only about an hour to spare I got out some writing materials and wrote a letter to my father. Then I lay down upon my new bed until half-past seven should arrive.

I think I must have fallen asleep, for I remember nothing until I heard a loud “jar-r-r-r-at” at my door.

“Come in!” I cried.

“It’s half-past seven, sir, and I’ve brought you

some hot water and your uniform ; but I can't find no mess-waistcoat, sir."

"The devil!" I ejaculated, remembering suddenly that my tailor had told me the day before that it still required a little pressing, but should be sent down that night without fail ; a promise he had, of course, taken infinite pains not to keep.

"Perhaps I can borrow one for you, sir," suggested Robinson.

"For goodness' sake, go and try," I said, eagerly.

He left on the table a letter, which I immediately opened and found it was an invitation from the colonel and officers of the regiment to dine. Not knowing the custom of the service, I at once set that down as "chaff," and the idea of answering it never once entered my head.

In about five minutes Robinson returned, with a dilapidated article, which I almost failed to recognize as a cavalry mess-waistcoat.

"I am not going to put that thing on!" I said, with much indignation.

Robinson, however, assured me that, even if I had it, it would be useless to wear anything better ; for the 400th Foot, who were quartered on the opposite side of the town, were to dine with the 52nd Dragoons that night, and there was sure to be some extra rough work going on.

When my dressing was complete, I found, as every one does on joining, that my uniform did not fit as it seemed to do in the tailor's shop. My overalls were too loose and baggy, and not high enough in the waist. Indeed, it was only by strapping them up till I thought they would crack that I managed to make the top of the overalls and the bottom of the waist-coat meet at all. The borrowed waistcoat, too, was so tight and uncomfortable about the neck that I thought if I could persuade anything more solid than soup and champagne to pass down my throat that night, I should be extremely lucky.

At last I was ready, and compelled to betake myself off in spite of the utter discomfort I was in. It was wonderful how I missed the tails of my ordinary evening coat; and I went down the steps—one could hardly call them stairs—and along the verandah into the ante-room, feeling as if I had suddenly been transformed into an exceedingly long-legged Manx cat.

Here I found a couple of waiters busily handing sherry-and-bitters to a room full of officers, some of whom, from the difference in their uniform, must, I knew, belong to the 400th. I approached one of the latter, in a very deferential spirit, and had certainly not said a dozen words before he remarked “Ah, I suppose you've just joined!”

This was a fact which I was most anxious to conceal, and the same sort of feeling crept over me which I should fancy comes over a man suddenly convicted of theft. I thought further parley with him would be useless, as he would be sure to laugh at everything I said, so I left him and sat down in a corner by myself until dinner was announced.

Being a guest, I was allowed to pass in amongst the first few, and had the pleasure of sitting next Major Silver, a man devoted to hunting, and never happy except in the pursuit of that sport or when talking of long runs, hunters, and hounds. Now, as I wasn't very well versed in that line, we bored each other terribly, and I was glad when he transferred his conversation from me to his right-hand neighbour, and I was left alone. I was very tired with unpacking; the dinner was so long, and the ready banter and chaff so bewildering, that once or twice it was as much as I could do to keep myself from falling asleep—an achievement which, if I had indulged in it, would have probably been attended by very serious consequences, and of which, so long as I remained in the army, I should never have heard the end.

Happily, however, dinner could not last all night, and at eleven o'clock the colonel and major, with some of the senior 400th guests, rose and went into the ante-room. I was following them, at a very re-

spectful distance, when—whirr, squash!—against the back of my head came an over-ripe orange, which sent me flying, as I thought for a moment, into another world. I turned as quickly as I could to see who had thrown it, but not a man was out of his place, there was not a smile upon a single lip. One of them, however, asked me to come back and have another glass of champagne before I went to bed. So I returned, and had the pleasure of a glass of wine with a man called Burroughes, the senior subaltern, and a wild harum-scarum sort of fellow, as I afterwards found to my cost.

This glass was followed by another and another and another, with first this and then that member of the mess, and, as the order of the night was no “heel-taps,” I began to think that the best thing I could do would be to slip away and be off to bed. So five minutes afterwards, little thinking how eagerly my brother officers were awaiting this event, and fondly imagining they were all too much occupied to take any notice of me or my exit, I quietly went to bed. In ten minutes I was sound asleep; but how long that sleep lasted I cannot say. I only know that I had a terrible dream, for I thought I had fallen into the hyena’s den at the Zoological Gardens, and then I awoke. There was such a yelling and shouting and holloaing at the foot of my stairs that

at first I feared there must be a fire or something of that sort. I soon discovered that the sounds were approaching my door with startling rapidity; and then, catching the sound of my own name, I knew instinctively that they were seeking me and meant me no good.

My first idea was that the best thing I could do would be to jump out of bed and slip on a smoking-suit or dressing-gown, and pretend I hadn't been to bed at all; but, on consideration, I thought I would stick to my bed and feign sound sleep. I was fool enough to imagine that perhaps, if they found me asleep, they might go away. Poor deluded Cornet Winter!

My heart had given a tremendous jump when I first heard them; and as they came nearer and nearer, so it got higher and higher, until by the time they reached my door it was fairly in my mouth.

“Has he locked the door?” I heard a voice say.

“Yes, rather.”

“Oh, capital!”

What could that mean?

“Go on, somebody.”

In two minutes my door gave way, and about a dozen officers came rolling and tumbling over each other into the room. Then a voice, which I recognised as Burroughes's, called out,

“Winter!”

No reply

“Winter!”

This time a little louder.

Still no answer.”

“Young devil’s shamming; pull him out.

Thereupon one or two seized the bar at the head of my bed, while as many others took hold of that at the foot, and they completely overturned me on to the floor, where I lay quite helpless with fright. Two young fellows immediately lifted me up, and, in spite of my urgent protests, conducted me downstairs to the ante-room, a prisoner of war, and dressed exactly as I had tumbled out of bed, with the addition of a pouch-belt and girdle, which they put on over my night-shirt to give me a martial bearing, as they termed it. I found that the ante-room table had been completely cleared of the newspapers, which were usually scattered upon it, and five chairs had been placed round it. In front of each were put blue paper, pens, and ink. I grew more and more frightened when I found I was to be tried by court-martial for a great and heinous offence committed against her Majesty.

Burroughes did not waste a moment in taking his seat at the table as president of the court-martial, and the other four were quickly filled in by junior officers. A sixth was appointed prosecutor; two

were announced as witnesses, and three were told off as a guard, one of them being promoted to the rank of corporal of the guard in charge of the prisoner.

The charges were then read as follows: 1. Conduct prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline on the part of John Strange Winter, cornet of the 52nd Dragoons, in having, at Colchester, on the night of the 10th of July, 18—, gone to bed, whilst several guests, officers of another regiment, remained in the ante-room—it being the duty of John Strange Winter, cornet, to entertain them. 2. Conduct unbecoming a subaltern in going to bed whilst senior officers remained in the ante-room.

I was then placed at the foot of the table between my escort, one of whom shouldered a pair of tongs and the other a shovel, while the corporal of the guard was armed with a poker, wherewith he every now and again gave me a dig behind, if I did not stand bolt upright at “attention.”

I was asked if I objected to be tried by any of the officers whom I saw at the table, and on receiving my answer in the negative, the oath was read.

“ You shall well and truly try and determine the case according to the evidence in the matter now before you, so help you Jorrocks, &c.”

This was taken in due form, and with the utmost

gravity, *Handley Cross* being, I believe, the book used ; and the trial proceeded.

Lieutenant Bates, on being duly sworn, stated :

“ Sir, at Colchester Barracks, on the night of the 10th of July, 18—, I saw the prisoner now before the court-martial sneak off to bed about half-past eleven. There were several guests, officers of another regiment, still remaining in the ante-room. I was also present when the prisoner was arrested in his own room.”

Lieutenant Cavasson, being duly sworn, stated :

“ Sir, I was in the mess-room when the prisoner went to bed. There were several captains and other senior officers still in the room”.

This closed the evidence for the prosecution, and the question was put to me,

“ Have you anything to urge in your defence ? ”

I told them in a tremulous voice that I really was very tired, that I did not dream I was committing an outrageous offence, and that I wouldn’t do it again.

Then I was conducted out of the room whilst the court considered its sentence.

Whilst we were waiting outside, my guards, with the witnesses and junior officers, amused themselves and terrified me by relating previous sentences, and wondering what I should get. It was awfully cold waiting about, for, although it was midsummer and

very hot in the day, yet, in the small hours of the night, to wait ten minutes in a draughty hall, with no more clothing than a night-shirt and a pouch-belt, is a very different matter. At last we were summoned within, and I was led to my place at the foot of the table. Lieutenant Burroughes broke the silence,

“John Strange Winter, you have been found guilty of two very glaring and very heinous offences, and this court has adjudged that you receive two strokes from a birch-rod from every member of the mess now present. I hope it may be a warning to you for the future.”

This announcement was received by my tormentors with a ringing cheer. I was ready to sink with fright when I saw the birch produced, and rough hands were laid upon me. My guard with the tongs, although apparently the roughest of the lot, whispered to me to “hold my jaw, and neither struggle nor cry out;” and something in the kindly voice told me his advice was good, so I took it.

The castigation was mere child’s play, except when it came to Borroughes’s turn.

“Ah, this won’t do,” I heard him say; “we shall have the young beggar laughing in his sleeve at us. We really must show him that there is something like discipline in the regiment.” And he certainly did.

“Well, come now,” said that stern gentleman,

when my punishment was over, “the young one’s plucky, at all events.”

If my brother officers had administered necessary strictness, I certainly could not complain of the way in which I was treated afterward ; for they carried me off into the mess-room, where we found a supper of grilled bones and devilled kidneys, and so forth, spread upon the table.

When we had eaten and drunken I was ordered to mount the brass and sing a song. The “brass” was a square piece of that metal formed by the meeting of the leaves of the table ; and a queer figure I must have cut in my scanty attire. They seemed to think so, for they all laughed and cheered heartily.

I had the sense to know that a moment’s hesitation would be fatal to my popularity, and I dashed at once into the first comic song that came into my head. It was the story of a sailor who got cast away upon an island, taken prisoner by savages, who appropriated his clothes to themselves, finally marrying him to a princess of the blood royal. It was received with uproarious applause ; but, unfortunately for me, I did not get to the end without an interruption. I only sang as far as,

And there behold me standing,
A waistcoat for my clothes,
A hat and boots, striped red and blue,
And a ring stuck through my nose,

when, to my dismay, I heard a voice suggesting that it would be all the better if I were dressed in character. The idea caught like wildfire—two pots of paint were produced, whence I know not, and in an incredibly short time I was daubed from head to foot with rings of red and blue paint, and again mounted on the brass to finish my song.

At last the revelries were ended, and I was permitted to go to my room, thoroughly worn out, and half-stifled by the disgusting smell and feeling of the paint. Luckily I knew something of art, and had a big bottle of turpentine with me, which, with the help of a palette-knife, brought most of the stuff off.

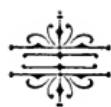
It was broad daylight ere I sought my couch ; and when at length I fell asleep, it was only to dream it all over again, and to sing in fancy the chorus of my song,

Jam-see, jee-me, jabber jee hoy !

Jabberee, doree, poree,

Hikey, pikey, sikey, crikey,

Chilingwoolahbadoree !



A CHERUB'S FACE UNDER A FORAGE-CAP.

It was just a cherub's face under a forage-cap which met Colonel Cotherstone's angry gaze, as he sat bolt upright in his chair one Saturday afternoon. A cherub's face, smooth and fair, which had as yet not the faintest signs of a moustache; a face with languishing azure eyes that went straight to Colonel Cotherstone's heart, in spite of his anger and the popular belief that he was in the fortunate possession of a lump of adamant instead of that too frequently inconvenient organ. The scene was the colonel's quarters in the cavalry barracks ta York; the time, between three and four in the afternoon; *dramatis personæ*, Colonel Edward le Gendre Cotherstone, Sergeant-Major McAllister, and Private Edward Jones, F-troop. It was Private Edward Jones who owned the cherub's face, the languishing blue eyes, the long lithe limbs, and, alas, also a bad character. The description would not have applied at all to the chief, who was largely-made and stalwart, with a sunburnt, rugged face, and hair plentifully besprinkled with grey. Nor would it have either done for the sergeant-major, who,

while owning the most irreproachable character, was fat and bald, and moreover did not possess a good feature on his broad red countenance.

"Sergeant-major, you can go," said Colonel Cotherstone curtly; whereupon that personage, having saluted, departed, feeling pretty sure that Private Jones was coming in for a severe wigging, or, as he put it, "The colonel's going to give it 'im proper."

But Colonel Cotherstone did not immediately set about the task which he had imposed upon himself. An obstacle, not very often coming between commanding officers and their troopers, presented itself in the shape of that dainty cherub face, with the fair waving hair and the languishing azure eyes, so like another face that he had known long ago *and loved!* At last, however, he forced himself to speak.

"And how long is this state of things to continue?" he demanded, sternly.

Private Jones maintained a discreet silence, but he shifted his long legs nervously, and lowered his eyes until the colonel could no longer see them. Once their gaze withdrawn from him he was able to speak fluently enough. Usually Colonel Cotherstone did not find himself at a loss for words.

"Now, look here, Jones," he said kindly, yet with sufficient firmness to make his words impressive, "we

must have a change. Almost every day I hear of some fresh misdemeanour, idleness, insubordination, work half done or left undone altogether, infringement of rules, absence without leave. What is the end to be?"

Private Jones shot one swift glance at his chief's keen angry face, opened his mouth as if to speak, but ended by remaining silent; the colonel, however, continued:

"By what chain of circumstances you came to enlist, I don't know; but if you imagined for an instant that your birth would permit you to ride rough-shod over everything, why, you made a mistake. Because you are a gentleman, because you can speak half-a-dozen languages, because you have got through your fortune and made an utter fool of yourself, you cannot be excused your duties or have your misdoings passed over without punishment. I dare-say it's hard for you to be restricted, to obey the non-commissioned officers, to turn out of your bed at five o'clock, to live with men of a different rank from your own; but you should have considered all that before you brought yourself down to your present position. With your advantages of education, you might get your commission in the course of a few years, and win back the position you have lost; but whilst your present bad conduct continues, I can do

nothing for you. I cannot pass you over the heads of men who do their duty conscientiously, men whom I can trust. If you do not choose to alter your present ways, you must make up your mind to remain a private always; there is no favouritism in the army. You have now been five months in the regiment, and those five months you have utterly wasted, always shielding yourself behind the fact that by birth you are a gentleman—by birth and by education. I tell you, sir, those two facts are a disgrace to you, simply a disgrace, instead of a blessing and an honour. As yet I have kept you out of the degradation of the cells; but I find that punishment by fines is of no avail—the punishment of a fine simply falls upon your mother."

Private Jones lifted his face all crimsoned by shamed blushes, and repeated Colonel Cotherstone's concluding words,

"My mother, sir?"

"Your mother, sir," returned the chief, sternly. "If you have no consideration for your family, for yourself, for the honour of your old name; no shame at the contempt of your officers, no dread of what the end of all this will be, does the thought of the mother who bore you never cross your mind?"

The lad turned away in confused silence.

"Answer me!" thundered the chief.

He spoke then for the first time, spoke in such a soft drawling voice, that Colonel Cotherstone absolutely shivered, it was so like that other voice :

“ Yes, sir, I do ; only it is so hard,” with a heavy sigh.

“ What is so hard—your work ? ”

“ No, sir ; I don’t know that I find the work so bad. I could always groom a horse well, and the stable-work I soon got used to. And I don’t mind the men—they’re rough, but they’re good-natured, most of them ; but it’s the non-commissioned officers—I *can’t* stand them, sir.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ I can do with old McAllister, sir,” said the lad eagerly, almost forgetting his drawl ; “ but the sergeants in F-troop—Oh Lord ! ” with another sigh. “ If I please one, I displease another. It’s having so many masters, and each thinks he has a right to bully me as hard as he likes. Because they’ve got a few shillings’ worth of gold lace on their jackets, I suppose.”

“ Which they have won by their own good conduct,” rejoined the colonel. “ I’ll tell you what it is, Hamilton : you’re a young fool, with only a little further to go in the direction you’re in now, to find yourself at the devil.”

“ You know me, sir ! ” the lad gasped.

"I knew your—people," answered the colonel, curtly. He had almost said "your mother," but changed the word in time to "people;" "and for your name's sake—not for your own mind—I will give you one more chance. If I move you out of F-troop into Sergeant-Major McAllister's, will you give me your word to try and reform?"

The crimson tide flushed anew over the lad's fair face, a rush of feeling (could that darkness be tears?) flooded into his azure eyes. He forgot that he was only Private Jones, and that the tall man with the stern bronzed face before him was that awe-inspiring being "the commanding officer," Colonel Cotherstone, one of the strictest martinet in the service—he forgot it all. He only remembered that he was Hamilton of Glenbarry, and that this was the first real kindness, except old McAllister's, that he had met with for months. In the impulse of the moment he held out his hand, and said heartily, "I'll try, sir."

Colonel Cotherstone just laid his fingers in the outstretched hand for a moment.

"Very well, Hamilton, I'll take your word," he replied, gravely. "Now you can go."

When the door had closed behind the lad, Colonel Cotherstone sat down again in his arm-chair and tried to think. But think he could not. A vision of a cherub's face under a forage-cap came persistently

between him and his thoughts. How many years was it ago that just such a head and face had lingered in his memory ; just such a cherub's face, and under a forage-cap ? And yet there was a difference. The mother's sweet blue eyes had looked straight into his own, with never a shade of the shame he had seen in those of the son that very day, and the forage-cap from under which the mother's golden curls had strayed bore the gold band of an officer, instead of the simple yellow of the dragoon.

He was not altogether easy in his mind, that big bronzed soldier. He knew that, in spite of his stern words, he had treated Private Jones a great deal too easily, else he would not have sent the sergeant-major away. It is not altogether usual for commanding officers to talk to refractory soldiers as he had talked to Private Jones, and yet—

“ No,” he muttered, “ I couldn't be hard on Mary's boy, who came and looked at me with Mary's eyes, and talked to me with Mary's soft tongue. Poor little Mary ! ” and straightway his thoughts flew back to the little scene enacted ever so many years ago, and which had been recalled so vividly to his memory that afternoon, a scene of which the principal incident was a cherub's face under a forage-cap.

Naturally, before Edward le Gendre Cotherstone had obtained his regiment, he had held the respective

positions of major, captain, lieutenant, and cornet. Well, it was when he was only Cornet Cotherstone, and but two-and-twenty, that he was foolish enough to fall in love.

At that time the cuirassiers were quartered at Edinburgh, and it was in the modern Athens that he and his fate met. That was one-and-twenty years before the opening of this story, when Colonel Cotherstone was forty-three, a first-rate soldier, and, considering all things, fairly popular, though his officers, especially the subalterns, quite believed in a theory, now of many years' standing, which declared him to be *minus* several important internal arrangements, one of which was a heart, the other being the bowels of compassion. He certainly was very hard. They all vowed he had not a single soft spot in his whole composition, but they were wrong. A soft place he had, and the unruly lad with a cherub's face had been lucky enough to find it out.

As I said before, Edward le Gendre Cotherstone was two-and-twenty when he fell in love for the first, indeed the only, time. He was driving along Prince's Street one afternoon, when a small Skye terrier managed to get itself under the horse's heels, and, in addition to that, one of the wheels passed over it. At every period of his life Edward Cotherstone had been as keen as a hawk is popularly supposed to be,

and a vision of a golden-haired girl dressed in black, who uttered a piteous cry, and put two little black-gloved hands out to rescue the little animal, who was howling frightfully, caused him to pull up the trap with a jerk, and jump down.

“Oh, I am sorry,” he said, bending over the little creature, now whining piteously in its young mistress’s arms. “I am so grieved. I hope it’s not much hurt.”

The girl’s blue eyes, half drowned as they were in tears, flashed an indignant glance at him.

“Wouldn’t you be hurt?” she asked, bluntly, pointing to the wheel as she spoke, “if that had gone right over your body?”

“What can I do to help you?” he asked, wisely ignoring the question. “Can I drive you home?”

“I live at Portobello,” she answered, helplessly.

“Please let me drive you there,” he urged. “Let me hold him whilst you get in, and then I’ll lay him ever so carefully on your lap.”

And so he had his own way; that was a little peculiarity of Edward Cotherstone’s. He took the dog from her with the utmost tenderness and without eliciting a single cry; and when she had mounted into the high trap, he restored it to her gentle keeping. On the way down to Portobello he gathered that the young lady’s name was Stewart, Mary

Stewart, and that she lived with her grandmother, who did not often go out. She told him, too, that she was seventeen ; and that Fluff, the injured Skye, had been given to her by her cousin, Hamilton of Glenbarry. She also told him that her father had not been dead many months, and that she had been both to London and Paris. In fact, she was so very communicative, that he thought he knew everything there was to be known about her ; but, notwithstanding her apparent candour, there was one trifling circumstance, which, had she mentioned, would have spared him many a bitter heartache. She did not mention it, however ! He took her to her home, and sent his trap away, as she wished him to examine and determine the full extent of the dog's injuries. He was introduced to the aged grandmother, who took quite a fancy to him by reason of having been at school—goodness knows how many years previously ! —with his great-aunt. She, too, mentioned Hamilton of Glenbarry, and mentioned him, moreover, in a way which did not show that any large amount of love was lost between them.

“ He does not always behave very respectfully to grandmamma,” Mary confided to him, in an undertone. “ He calls her ‘ old lady,’ and she can’t bear it.”

“ Confounded cad ! ” thought Mr. Cotherstone.

They found, upon examination, that Fluff was not

very much the worse for his accident ; and little Miss Stewart was comforted beyond measure when the young cuirassier assured her that when the bruises had passed off he would be all right again.

But of course he called next day to ask after Fluff and ascertain if Miss Stewart had recovered from her fright. He was also remarkably attentive to the old lady, and won her heart as easily as he did that of her granddaughter. For some few months this kind of thing continued. Edward Cotherstone grew more and more happy ; but little Mary faded somewhat, drooped as does a floweret for lack of water and sunshine. Sometimes she frightened him, she looked so pale, so wan and fragile ; then again she would brighten when he appeared, and throw him into fresh transports of love and happiness ; and so the pretty play went on until it was played out, for one fine morning in June the crash came. He had gone in for half-an-hour, because he knew Mrs. Stewart would not be visible so early in the day. Mary looked so bright and fresh, that the young soldier was tempted to take her in his arms and kiss her, calling her by every fond endearing name he could think of, telling her over and over again how he loved her, how very, very dearly he loved her, his little Scottish lassie, and a good deal more in the same strain. And Mary, what of her ? She never drew back, never whispered

the faintest hint of that secret which lay between her and him—the secret which once or twice he had almost stumbled upon. No, she clung to him with an almost despairing passion, which made him feel uneasy in spite of his happiness ; she twined her soft arms round his throat, and cried incredulously,

“ Do you really love me, Eddie ? ”

“ Really, my darling,” he answered.

And then she broke from the clasp of his loving arms almost impatiently, though the love-light still shone in her azure eyes, the dimpling smiles still played about her tender mouth.

“ I shall try on your cap,” she announced, coquettishly ; then stuck the golden-bordered little cap on one side of her head, and, turning from the glass, looked at him with passionate love filling her blue eyes, love which she had caught from his. The sound of a carriage stopping without caused her to turn her head, and when she looked at him again the smiles had frozen on her sweet mouth, and a nameless horror had taken the place of the tender light which a moment before was shining in her eyes.

“ Oh, my darling, what is it ? ” the young soldier cried, in sudden affright.

“ It is Hamilton of Glenbarry,” she answered, in a hoarse whisper.

“ What is he to you ? ” Cotherstone cried, passionately.

"He is my—"

"Your what? For God's sake speak, and let me know the worst!" he said, fiercely.

"He will be my husband," she answered, in a voice almost inaudible.

With almost brutal roughness Cotherstone thrust her away from him, caught up his cap and gloves, and strode out of the house, where he had spent such blissful hours, and where, alas, he had had such a bitter blow—and he never saw her again.

The following day came a piteous note of explanation—how her father had wished it; how she had given Hamilton the promise to please her father when he was dying; how she had not had courage to tell him earlier, because she had never dreamed he could care for her; how she was very, very unhappy, *very*—with a great dash under the adverb, and a woeful blister just below—how, though she must keep her promise, she would love her darling Eddie best all her life long.

And that was the end of it. A few weeks later he saw the announcement of her marriage in the papers, and then he tore her letter up and set himself to forget her. On the whole he succeeded fairly well. He threw himself heart and soul into his profession, with what result we have seen. He succeeded in making every one, even himself, believe he was a man

of the consistency of stone ; and yet when Private Jones—brought in to receive a severe lecture, not for one but for a dozen misdemeanours—came and looked at him out of Mary's blue eyes, and talked to him in Mary's soft voice, he could not find it in his heart—his adamantine heart—to be hard upon Mary's boy.

The vision of the cherub's face under a forage-cap threw him back with painful distinctness to the time, one-and-twenty years before, when he parted from Mary. He realised, that Saturday afternoon in November, that perhaps he had been very hard upon her, poor little soul ! He might, at least, have stayed and said a few kind words to the poor little woman, who was bound to a man she hated ; that she hated Hamilton there could be no doubt, for the look of loathing and horror which leapt into her eyes as she realised his presence proclaimed her feelings plainly enough. Ah, poor darling—she had got from “poor little soul” to “poor darling”—but he felt now that he had been cruel to her ; he might, at least, have answered that heart-broken, despairing letter, and so perhaps have made her lot less hard to bear than probably it was. Well, at all events, he had not been hard upon the boy, that was one consoling point. Boys will go wrong, especially when they have no father to keep them straight. He had suspected all along who Private Jones really was, though until

that very afternoon he had not been quite certain. He wondered if a letter to his mother would do any good. She was a widow now, poor soul—Hamilton had been dead ten years, he knew—and naturally she would be glad to know there was some one who took an interest in her only child—that Mrs. Hamilton of Glenbarry had had but one child Colonel Cotherstone was also aware—and certainly if he wrote a few lines she could not take them amiss, and they might be a comfort to her.

And so Colonel Cotherstone sat down to his writing-table to pen an epistle to his old love, Mary Stewart, the mother of that exceedingly wayward young gentleman, Private Edward Jones, F-troop, cuirassiers.

“She called him after me, too,” murmured the commanding officer of the cuirassiers, as he selected a pen. “Poor little Mary!”

It was easy enough to write “Nov. 14th” under the printed “CAVALRY BARRACKS, YORK,” which was already stamped on the paper, but he found the next part scarcely so easy. His most natural impulse was to begin, “My dear Mary;” yet, when he had written it, he thought it too familiar, so took another sheet. Having put another “November 14th” at the top, he began, “My dear Mrs. Hamilton—”

“What shall I say next?” he said aloud.

It took him a long time to write that letter; but

at last he accomplished it. It was not very long, and it was rather stiff. It ran :

MY DEAR MRS. HAMILTON,

I have only this afternoon discovered that your son has enlisted in the cuirassiers under the name of Jones. He has been five months in the regiment ; and though as yet he is impatient of restraint, I am in hopes that we shall make a good soldier of him, and, in the course of a few years, that he will obtain his commission. Any interest of mine, you may be sure, he will not want.

Believe me, my dear Mrs. Hamilton,

Most faithfully yours,

EDWARD LE GENDRE COTHERSTONE.

That was the letter he wrote and sent. Three days passed, during which he received no reply—a fact which worried him somewhat. On the fourth day, however, he received a note, by hand, from Mrs. Hamilton; asking him to call and see her at the “Black Swan Hotel.”

He happened to be just going out when the note reached him, so he thrust it into his pocket—not without a certain feeling of tenderness at the sight of the dainty delicate characters—and took his way into the town. He did not go very quickly, though ; he called at the florist’s half-way, and bought a flower for his button-hole—a white rosebud it was. He met some people that he knew, and stayed to chat with them.

But, dawdle as he would, he came to the hotel at last. Every one who has been in York knows that it is not very far from the cavalry barracks to the

“Black Swan.” Colonel Cotherstone went into the hall and asked for Mrs. Hamilton.

“Was Mrs. Hamilton at home?”

“Certainly. Would the gentleman step this way?”

And so they led him up-stairs and ushered him into a room, where, seated by the fire, was a lady—a lady with wavy golden hair, with soft blue eyes, and two little white hands outstretched to greet him—his old love, Mary Stewart.

“How am I to thank you?” she cried. “I have tried for all these five months to find out what my boy was doing. I couldn’t persuade him to come home, and I have been so unhappy about him.”

“Has he never written to you?”

“Oh yes; every week regularly. But I did not know that he was in York. His letters came from London; and the only address was a London post-office. He said he was not in prison, but he couldn’t tell me any more.”

“No, he has not been in prison,” Colonel Cotherstone answered, smiling, as he thought of the near shaves he had had in that respect.

“I didn’t quite understand your letter,” said Mrs. Hamilton presently. “Why should he be ashamed of the profession he has taken up—too much ashamed

even to tell me what it was? Why should he have any restraint placed upon him? Have the other officers so much restraint?"

"My dear Mrs. Hamilton, your son has *enlisted*," said the colonel kindly, wondering at her ignorance.

"How enlisted?"

"He is not in my regiment as an officer," he said.

"What! My boy a common soldier?"

"A private," corrected Colonel Cotherstone, gently. "Yes, that is what he is."

"My boy," cried the little woman, brokenly, "my boy, Hamilton of Glenbarry, a soldier! Does he have to groom a horse, pray?"

"Certainly."

"And to do stable-work?"

"Yes."

"Does he have to salute you?"

"Of course." In spite of himself a smile broke over his face. "I hope that is not very hard for him."

"Not to you," she said, impatiently. "No one would mind saluting you, of course; but the others! You don't mean to say he is obliged to put his hand up so"—with a ludicrous imitation of a salute—"to all the young subs., to the riding-master even?"

"He certainly has to do so," answered the colonel.

"Hamilton of Glenbarry salute, touch his hat to a riding-master!" ejaculated Mrs. Hamilton. "I tell you it is absurd, utterly absurd!"

"Whilst he remains in the ranks it must be done," said the colonel, smiling still at her vehemence.

"Then he shall not remain in the ranks," she cried. "How soon can I have him released?"

"Will you take my advice," he asked, "and leave him for a few months, or until I advise you to buy him off?"

"You would do what is best for me?" the widow faltered.

"You know I would," touching her hand for a moment. That was a great advance for Colonel Cotherstone; but the old influences were strongly at work in him.

"I don't know why you should be so good to me," she said, rather forlornly. "I behaved very badly to you, and yet—"

"Yet what?" drawing nearer and taking her hand.

"I was so unhappy," she said, simply.

They were both standing on the rug: he, a large, fine, upright figure in grey tweed; she, a dainty thing in purple velvet, looking absurdly young to be the mother of Private Jones.

"Why were you unhappy, and when?" he asked, possessing himself of the other hand.

"When you went away; and—and because—I—"

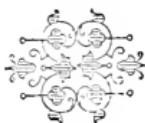
"Well?" he asked, eagerly. "Because you—"

"Because I loved you so," she said, hiding her face upon his breast.

If Colonel Cotherstone's dream of love was rudely interrupted one-and-twenty years before, when, on that June morning, Hamilton of Glenbarry turned up so inopportunely, he made up for it when he found his little love in the hotel with the sign of the "Black Swan" at York. It would be hard to say who was the most surprised at the event which followed, or rather at the announcement of it. I doubt whether the officers, when, the next evening after dinner, their chief announced that he was going to be married, were as thoroughly surprised as was Ned Hamilton, when, a free man again, he entered his mother's room at the "Black Swan"; and I am perfectly certain that his astonishment did not equal that of his mother when she found how faithfully Edward Cotherstone had loved her all those years. Perhaps the most thoroughly amazed of them all was Colonel Cotherstone himself.

To the intense amusement of the whole regiment, his wife calls him "Eddie." The young ones say that he grew tired of having no heart, so managed to get his brains exchanged for one; but if one of them

goes a little wrong in duty or any other respect, he very quickly finds out that the chief's brain is as keen as ever it was in the days when he was popularly believed to be altogether deficient in certain internal arrangements, of which a heart was one.



CALCRAFT—A TROOPER.

THE Cotherstones had been married a few months, and were living at a pretty house in the village of Fulford, which lies about half-a-mile beyond the cavalry barracks at York.

Mrs. Cotherstone was standing at the window of the dining-room, watching for her husband, and, at the same time, taking notes of the interesting process of putting a horse into a cab belonging to the inn opposite. Very slow about his job the man was; the straps seemed to get wrong as each one was fastened. The horse was not particularly anxious to expedite the work, and kept shifting his position every moment, at which proceeding the man expressed his disapproval in a series of “gee-whoops” and “gerrup-ma-lads,” of which the animal took but small notice. Then he went inside the inn, for a glass of beer evidently. Mrs. Cotherstone was disgusted. She could, she felt, have put that horse in and been at the house to which it had been ordered in less than half the time that it had taken the man to fasten one strap. She wondered if it was wanted

to catch a train? It couldn't be for a wedding—it was after one o'clock; then, but to be sure, it might be wanted for a funeral! She drummed her little fingers impatiently upon the window-ledge, and wondered indignantly how much longer that man was going to be drinking that glass of beer? Why, she could have drank half-a-dozen glasses of beer in that time, she was convinced, though Mrs. Edward le Gendre Cotherstone was not given to beer!

Then a *divertissement* fortunately came, in the shape of a tall, soldierly figure, in undress, carrying a whip in one hand—a man with a stern bronzed face, having, just then, a most pre-occupied expression. It cleared, however, as he perceived the golden-haired little lady at the window, much as a thunder-cloud disperses before the genial influence of the sun, but not before she had noticed the unwonted darkness.

“What is the matter, Ned?” she asked, as he entered the room.

“Oh! nothing particular, my darling,” he answered; “it is only that poor devil, Calcraft, again.”

“Again?” the little woman echoed, blankly; “and after you gave him such a talking to?”

Her tone implied that since the colonel had taken the trouble to give Calcraft a “talking to,” his gratitude ought to have induced him, from that time forth, to become a model of good conduct and amiability.

“ It isn’t all his fault,” said the colonel ; “ but he is quick-witted and sharp-tongued—the two qualities often go together—and, somehow, he has contrived to get out of his sergeant-major’s good graces ; you know what that means ? ”

“ Bullying, I suppose ? ”

“ Bullying is rather a mild general term for it,” Colonel Cotherstone answered. “ In detail it means nagging, continual fault-finding, swearing at, reporting—that is one side. On the other it means, never doing right, always doing wrong, always being late, never being clean enough, everlastingly breaking or infringing rules, being perpetually goaded to the verge of madness, being taunted, scorned, made nothing of ; and, like a boil, matters generally come to a head—they have come to a very decided head in Calcraft’s case, poor devil.”

“ Well ? ” said Mrs. Cotherstone, in a tone implying that he was to continue his story.

“ He is rather a favourite of Dickson’s—he is in Dickson’s troop, you know. He has looked after him as well as he could ; but what can an officer do under such circumstances ? Next to nothing ; and this morning the crash has come. Sergeant-Major Lucas and his wife live at the end of a verandah, which Calcraft has to pass every morning with a big bucket of cold water, and, being an awfully hot

night, they had left their window wide open. It seems that this morning Lucas hadn't turned out so early as he ought to have done, not by an hour or more, and as Calcraft passed along the verandah with his bucket of water, some fiend whispered into his ear that the water was very cold, that the window was wide open, and that the Lucas' bed stood immediately beneath it. Of course it was all done in a moment, and Calcraft took to his heels, and then there seems to have been a royal row. Calcraft, the usual scapegrace, was accused, and was marched off to the cells, poor beggar, to await a trial by court-martial. However, there's one thing I can and will do! I can't save Calcraft, but, by George, I'll be down upon Lucas for being late."

"Can't you get Calcraft off?" Mrs. Cotherstone asked in a voice choking with laughter, and wiping the tears from her eyes as she spoke.

"Utterly impossible," he returned, decidedly; "a court-martial must go by evidence, not by private favour."

"I shall give him a sovereign for himself, when I see him," Mrs. Cotherstone announced. If anyone had made such a startling proposal to Colonel Cotherstone a year previously, he would have positively jumped off his seat with horror, and expressed his opinion that such a proceeding would infallibly send

the service to the dogs in no time; but on the present occasion he merely possessed himself of one of Mary's little delicate hands, and, with an indulgent laugh, told her she must keep her doings to herself.

“Don’t let me know anything about it, for it won’t do to have it said that I encourage insubordination in the regiment.”

Some of my readers may have seen the interior of a barrack-cell. Such will know that they are not pleasant places. Those who have never entered one must take my word for it! Private Calcraft knew them well, and each experience he had of them he found them less to his taste. During that brilliant summer-day he sat pondering over the fate which had led him into disfavour with Sergeant-Major Lucas. How was it that he hated him so? He was quite sure he had never done anything to merit it: no one else in the whole regiment hated him as Lucas did. I cannot say that he was particularly repentant for what he had done, and there was not a shadow of doubt that he was the culprit, though as yet he had maintained a stolid silence upon the subject; but he found the confinement of his cell irksome, and he would like to have heard what his comrades were saying about his exploit, which would, he knew, be on every tongue in the barracks. Well! he should get it “proper,” as he put it, for this

business, he had no doubt. They were sure to be pretty hard upon him, he so often got into trouble, and of course they would take the sergeant-major's account before his; not that he had any account to give. He had, as yet, kept quiet, without attempting any explanation, and he thought that would be the best course to adopt, whatever came of the affair; besides, what had he to say?

He leant forward, with his elbows on his knees, and watched a ray of sunshine, which had had sufficient bad taste to weary of the outer world and penetrate, by way of a change, into the cell. Calcraft was very glad to see the sunbeam, though it seemed to him that it couldn't have very much sense to come in there, when it might have stayed outside and be free, and then he fell to wishing that he, too, was free. He wondered how it was that he had borne the tyrant's tyranny so long. Many a man would have made a bolt of it, and trusted to luck that he didn't wake up some fine morning to find himself branded with the letter which would be a shame to him as long as he should live, even to his grave. But no! After all, he wouldn't be such a mean-spirited coward as that. He had fought on for five years, and, come what might, he would fight on a bit longer. Maybe Lucas would be leaving the regiment, or dying, or something of that sort, and then see if he didn't show

his officers that he had some good in him, after all! He could just fancy the kindly approval in Captain Dickson's keen blue eyes when he won a good conduct stripe, or was made corporal! Aye! He would keep up his pluck for a while longer, and try if matters wouldn't mend a bit. Just as he arrived at this satisfactory conclusion, the door of the cell opened, and the object of his thoughts appeared—Captain George Dickson.

Calcraft jumped up from his bench, and Captain Dickson sat down upon it.

“Well! you've made an awful mess of it this time, Calcraft,” he observed.

“Yes, sir,” returned Calcraft, with a salute.

“It's no use trying to keep you straight,” the officer observed, testily. “I shall have to give you up altogether.”

Calcraft made no reply; hitherto he had exulted much over his exploit, but since it was to cost him the kindness of his captain, he began to look at it in quite another light.

“And, by-the-bye, Calcraft,” said Captain Dickson, suddenly, “what the dickens were you doing in the verandah at five o'clock?”

“Wasn't there, sir,” he replied, promptly.

“Sergeant-Major Lucas says it was striking five as the bucket of water came through the window.”

“Then it couldn’t be me as threw it, sir,” said Calcraft, solemnly, “for, when five o’clock struck by Fulford church, I was standing just outside the door of F-troop room, with Private Wells and Corporal Fraser—as they’ll both tell you, sir.”

“I’ll look into the matter,” answered the captain, rising; “and, Calcraft, if you should be lucky enough to get over this business, just let it be a warning to you.”

“I will, sir,” he said, earnestly enough, but whether some expression in his captain’s eyes upset his gravity or not I cannot say, only at that moment his solemn red face relaxed, and the hearty laughter came bubbling up to his lips: it might be at the remembrance of the douche-bath, which he had so successfully administered to his enemy, and, as he dared not laugh outright, his feelings found a vent in a violent fit of coughing, and Captain Dickson beat a hasty retreat; perhaps he wished to laugh in comfort out of Calcraft’s sight.

In due time Calcraft was brought before the court-martial. The sergeant-major told his story glibly enough; in truth, there was not very much to tell.

“On the morning of the 10th of July he was in bed, the window was open at the top, the church clock at Fulford struck five—he was perfectly sure as to the time, because he had compared his watch

with it: just as he laid the watch down a bucketful of water was emptied through the window over the bed; he could not see the face of the man who did it, but he saw the hands; he could positively swear to their being the prisoner's hands!"

So ended the case for the prosecution. Sergeant-Major Lucas retired with a well-satisfied smile at Calcraft, who returned it with a defiant stare.

Then—greatly to the sergeant-major's astonishment—appeared two witnesses for the prisoner, Corporal Fraser and Private Wells, who both deposed positively to the truth of Calcraft's statement, that, at five o'clock on the morning of the 10th of July, he was standing with them at the door of F-troop room. Corporal Fraser also deposed that the prisoner was not out of his sight until after half-past five. Accordingly Calcraft was acquitted!

Now Calcraft had made Captain Dickson a distinct promise that, if he should be lucky enough to get over the affair, it should be a warning to him; therefore immediately he found himself a free man he at once proceeded to break it. First of all, he informed the non-plussed sergeant-major—who, to save himself from censure for being late, had set the time back a whole hour, and so enabled Calcraft to get off scot-free—that the way to catch a bird was by putting salt on its tail, for which

valuable information he did not even deign to thank him.

Finding that had no effect, Calcraft, like an idiot—as most soldiers are when left to themselves—occupied himself for a week in taking every available opportunity of passing along the verandah, in which his enemy's room was situate, singing at the top of his voice the refrain of a little song—

The old old story was told again,
At five o'clock in the morning !

Finally he brought matters to a climax by asking if he and “the Missis” had found the water very cold? Flesh and blood could stand it no longer. The sergeant-major went to Captain Dickson, and reported that Calcraft had owned to throwing the water! Calcraft denied it, and repeated what had really taken place. Lucas held to his story, and eventually Calcraft's patience—of which he had not at any time a very large stock—gave way, and, in spite of his officer's presence, he rushed at his enemy, and administered a sound drubbing! That was fatal! There was the tedium of another court-martial: the thrashing—and it was a sound one—counted for a good deal, and the provocation and the bullying, on the other hand, went for next to nothing. Calcraft received the longest sentence which could be given to him, also the prison-crop, and was heard no more of until he was once more free.

August and September slipped away quickly enough to most people, but very slowly indeed to poor Calcraft, in his durance vile. The longest period, however, must come to a close, and the darkest night end in morning. His term of imprisonment did come to an end, in time; but as to his night of troubles ending in the morning in peace and quietness, why, that was quite another matter. Calcraft thought his trials and difficulties grew denser. At first he tried hard to keep straight, for he knew if he could but rise to the rank of corporal, his enemy's power would be considerably lessened; but, try as he would, it seemed quite impossible for him to succeed. The glorious autumn days passed by, each one finding him sunk a little deeper in the slough of despond, each one leaving him a trifle more wretched than the last, and more passionately desirous of lying down to die in peace. Yes! it had come to that. He had begun to look back to the long, dreary weeks he spent in the cells as a time when he had known what it was to have peace and rest. He felt himself a disgrace to his regiment, yet they would not let him do any better, and he did try! He fancied—for he had grown morbidly sensitive of late—that when his officers passed him they looked at him with scorn—all fancy, poor fellow, for they never looked at him at all, or bestowed a second thought upon him, though

“Calcraft, poor devil,” was their usual way of speaking of him when they did mention him, and most of them hated Lucas as much as they pitied his victim. Still a contemptuous pity was not calculated to improve the state of a man on the verge of madness, as Calcraft at that time was; and had it not been for two persons, he would not have borne up as long as he did. Those two persons were the colonel’s golden-haired, gentle little wife and Captain Dickson. For them both Calcraft, in his utter misery, conceived a passionate adoration. First in his poor tormented heart he held the lady. She had carried out her intention, which she had announced to her husband, and, on the first opportunity, had given Calcraft a sovereign, which he, poor chivalrous fool, had had a ring put through, and slung it to his watch-chain; and whenever she met him her gentle “Good morning, Calcraft,” fell upon his ear with such an accustomed sweetness that he could have flung himself down and kissed her very feet, in gratitude for the kindness which cost her nothing, but which, to him, was the one ray of sunshine which brightened his lot. No, not quite the only ray; he had forgotten Captain Dickson.

Towards the end of November Captain Dickson’s servant died, and he chose Calcraft to fill his place. Then his troubles lightened somewhat, for he was necessarily less in his enemy’s power; but, unfortu-

nately, the partial reprieve had come too late—the evil had gone too far, and he was unable to shake off the effects of the past five years and the continual ill-treatment he had endured—the shame and degradation which had been thrust upon him during the past few months.

Things had gone badly enough with him since the day he joined the regiment ; but until that fatal July morning when he had succumbed to the voice of the fiend, which prompted him to pour a pail of water over Mr. and Mrs. Lucas, he had gone on his careless way, almost unmindful of anything his enemy might do to torment him. His long term of imprisonment he had endured with a considerable amount of cheerfulness and pluck, expressing his opinion to more persons than one that the thrashing he had administered was well worth the after-consequences. Alas ! he had not at that time counted upon what was to follow !—it surpassed even his ideas of what bullying meant, and he had had considerable experience in that respect, as has been shown. If he had gone into Captain Dickson's service immediately after his release from the cells he might have been able to carry out the good resolutions he had formed during his confinement: as it was, the partial reprieve came too late ; his spirit was cowed utterly, his aspirations after something nobler were crushed, his courage

gone ! The very appearance of the man was changed ; his fearless blue eyes had acquired a wild unsettled expression, and he seldom looked any one straight in the face ; his face, which had once been of a healthy red, had faded to a sickly pallor, and the flesh had fallen away from his cheeks. He had lost the careless, swaggering gait which had once distinguished him and now seemed to have no energy for anything but sauntering—no, trailing is a better word—trailing about the quaint narrow streets, taking no notice of man, woman or child. If Captain Dickson happened to be out or was dining at mess he did not even do that, but stayed in his room—which he had leave to do—being sure there of peace and quietness.

The winter days crept on, and Calcraft's spirit sank lower, his despondency increased, his face grew paler, and his air more dejected. Just before Christmas he got a kick from a horse, which laid him up for a fortnight in hospital. A year before he would hardly have noticed it, but, in his weakened state of body and mind, the trifling accident proved more serious ! Not that he minded it : he had a happy time of it in hospital. The doctor always had a pleasant, cheery word for him ; the nurses, if rough, were kindly, and treated him just the same as the others ; his master went across to see him every morning, and lent him more books and papers than his poor dazed eyes

could bear to read, and, greatest of all the little pleasures which fell to his lot, Mrs. Cotherstone herself sent him a basket of grapes and oranges on Christmas morning, which threw the poor fellow into a perfect fever of anxiety, until he had despatched a note of grateful thanks, which, if he had but known it, brought the scalding tears into the gentle little woman's soft eyes ! Oh ! those grapes and oranges ! it seemed like desecration to eat them. Willingly would Calcraft have kept them, like the sovereign on his watch chain, as precious relics !

But at last this pleasant time came to an end and he was pronounced well enough to resume his duties. So he had to turn his back upon his pleasures, and go back to the old routine. He found, to his utter dismay and horror, that Captain Dickson was going on leave for two months and could not take a servant with him. Oh ! the agony the news caused to Calcraft's heart. Oh ! the bitter, bitter disappointment and dread !

He took the news quietly enough, for his master was rather late and in a hurry to be dressed ; but when the long process was finished, and he had gone clanking along the echoing corridor and down the stone steps, Calcraft flung himself down upon the bed, and burying his face among the pillows, broke into such a passionate torrent of tears, that the private's

wife who kept the room tidy, happening to come in at that moment, stood stock-still in the doorway, absolutely aghast. Her womanly instinct, however, impelled her to make some effort to comfort him.

“What’s up, Calcraft?” she asked, advancing to the bed, and laying a hand—which, if coarse and work-worn, was kindly—upon his head: “is there something else gone wrong? I wouldn’t take on so about it if I was you—though I’m sure, poor chap, it do seem never-ending.”

She was a good-hearted woman, and she meant to do kindly; yet, if she had quietly gone away and left him to sob the cobwebs out of his brain his agony might have passed; as it was, he jumped up and rushed out of the room, stung afresh by the shame of having been discovered in tears by a woman.

He never stopped to think; he tore across the barrack-square and out of the gates, though the sentry asked if anything was amiss as he passed. Calcraft never heard him! On he sped, seeing nothing for the blinding tears which filled his eyes, hearing nothing for the agony throbbing in his brain. On he went! along the path leading through the drill-field, unaware that Captain Dickson had flung himself off his horse, and, followed by half-a-dozen dragoons, had started in pursuit with a cry of “Great God! the river!” Calcraft never heard

or saw anything save that broad stream shining through the trees at the other end of the drill-field—the river, where he might find what he had been seeking so long, a haven of forgetfulness and peace !

Ah ! the yell which rose up from the on-lookers as the tall figure sprang headlong into the water, followed, an instant later, by the officer and a young private, who had been Calcraft's friend ! There was just one moment of suspense before the captain's dark, close-cropped head appeared above the bank, and then that of the private as they dragged the poor fellow on to the walk.

Colonel Cotherstone just reached the walk as Captain Dickson gave Calcraft's arm an angry shake.

“ What are you thinking of, you d——d idiot ? ” he asked, indignantly.

Calcraft looked at his preserver in a blank, dazed kind of way. “ You'd best have let me finish it, sir,” he answered, indistinctly, and then fainted away !

“ Dash me ! ” said the young private, wiping the water from his face—there might have been a few tears there, too—“ Dash me, if I ever saw anything like that ! ”

“ Here, some of you get him up to the hospital at once,” ordered the colonel; “ and you, Captain Dickson, the sooner you get those wet clothes off

the better; you, too, Johnson: you have acted with great bravery, but there is no need to have rheumatic fever as a consequence."

* * * * *

"I'll tell you what you shall do," said little Mrs. Cotherstone, when she heard the story a few hours later; "you shall buy his discharge—don't you call it so?—and give him to me."

"But what will you do with him?"

"Make a butler of him," was the prompt reply.

For many weeks, though, it seemed as if Calcraft would have no need of interest or of anything else in this world. He lay on his bed in the hospital, raving in brain fever, and, when at last that left him, the doctors found the prostration and weakness almost worse to deal with than the fever had been.

But they brought him round after all, or perhaps, as Dr. Markham declared, the medicine which did him most good was when Mrs. Cotherstone went to see him, and asked if he would like to leave the army and enter their service as a butler.

"But I don't know anything of the work, ma'am," he stammered, though the pleased flush on his poor worn face showed how intense was his delight at her proposal.

“But you can learn,” she answered, decidedly; and so poor Calcraft’s future was settled.

He progressed with amazing rapidity after that, and, in order to complete the cure, Mrs. Cotherstone sent him to her Scotch place for a month, where, as he himself said, he was almost too happy to live.

Not very long after this Mrs. Cotherstone presented her lord with a son and heir. Oh! that child! How in the years which followed Calcraft worshipped him. No service which the youngster exacted was too difficult for Calcraft to perform; to him the boy’s wishes and commands were law, absolute as “the laws of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not!” All the passionate gratitude which the mother had raised in him he lavished upon the boy, and the sweetest music that ever rang in his ears was when the tender, imperative child’s voice sounded through the house, with the word which was oftenest upon his lips—that word was “Cal——cwaft!”



THE VICTORIA CROSS;
WHY MAJOR CREYKE DID NOT WIN IT.

It was midwinter. The afternoon of a dull December day was drawing to a close, and as yet the lamps were not lighted in the drawing-room of the house which the Cotherstones called home. A blazing fire, however, lighted up the room sufficiently for little Mrs. Cotherstone to study the pages of a book which she held in her hand. The colonel sat opposite, tired out by a hard day's work, and more than half asleep. The boy, now nearly a year old, was on the rug between them, holding a court-martial on his father's boots, occasionally pricking himself with the spurs, and making his tiny hands excessively dirty, his hands and his little embroidered frock.

“Ned,” remarked the colonel's wife, *apropos* of nothing, “I've been looking in the *Army List*.”

“Eh, what, my darling?” suddenly rousing himself into an upright position.

“I've been looking in the *Army List*,” she repeated.

“Oh, is that all? I thought something had happened to the boy,” sinking back in his chair again.

Reminded of the boy, Mrs. Cotherstone looked

down, and, seeing his occupation, uttered a scream of disgust, which the child quickly echoed by a loud crow of delight.

“Dir-ty boy!” cried Mrs. Cotherstone, in energetic staccato tones; “such a mess he’s in. Ring the bell, Ned dear, please.”

The colonel did as he was told, and a moment later our old friend Calcraft appeared, looking quite irreproachable in his faultless evening attire.

“Take him away, Calcraft,” cried the little lady; “he has made himself so dirty with Colonel Cotherstone’s boots.”

As Calcraft advanced, the child put out two dimpled arms to him, and expressed his satisfaction in a series of “Boo-o-o-o’s.”

“How fond he is of the child!” said the colonel’s wife, as the door closed.

“Yes,” answered the colonel; he was rather sleepy.

“I’ve been looking in the *Army List*,” Mrs. Cotherstone announced for the third time, “and I cannot find anywhere that Major Creyke has the Victoria Cross.”

“Of course not,” returned the colonel, with a laugh.

“But he has it.”

“Certainly not.”

“ But they always call him ‘V.C. Creyke,’ ” she said, in a mystified tone.

“ It is only a nickname, child ; ” he often called her “ child, ” though she had a son of age.

“ However did he get such a name ? Oh, I am so disappointed, Ned. I have been fancying all sorts of bravery ; and now it has gone.”

“ Oh, he has bravery and pluck enough ; you need not be disappointed, ” he answered. “ He gained the name out in the Mutiny, though he did not win the Cross itself.”

“ And how was it ? ” she asked, with deep interest.

“ Well, I can only give you the merest outlines of the story, ” he said, “ for it’s a good while ago, and my head was in a state of confusion for a long time after that awful business had been cleared up. Creyke’s father and mine were, from their earliest boyhood, upon terms of the closest friendship ; their fathers had been the same before them. My father owned the Hall ; Creyke’s father was rector of the parish. Well, Creyke was only a year younger than I was, and somehow we fell into the same line as our fathers and grandfathers had done before us, and our friendship was, I really believe, more passionate and tragically inclined than even their’s. We were lucky enough to get into the same regiment, and we were so silly as to get sent to India, soon after which

the Mutiny broke out ; it was *just* after you were married, Mary."

"Yes," she replied, "but the regiment did not go."

"No. The 7th Lancers were short of subalterns, having lost several by cholera or misadventure, and I volunteered to go ; they wanted two. Of course Creyke insisted upon going too, though his father and mine came down to us, and did their best to persuade us not to go. It was no good. I had made up my mind, and Creyke's mind was mine ; so we went. It was all very jolly at first : we liked India, and there was any amount of splendid sport. We liked the regiment, and Colonel Cornwallis was a down-right good sort, with the sweetest, prettiest little wife you ever saw. The fellows used to fight almost as to whether Mrs. Cornwallis or her sister, Miss Bannister, was the lovelier. For my part I admired the colonel's wife the more of the two—I always did like fair women best : Miss Bannister was very dark. It was no good any of the subalterns looking at her, for the major went out in the same ship with her, and made matters safe ; though I don't think they were engaged. Well, the Mutiny broke out, and then we found what two splendid women they were ! They had always been admired, but after the siege began they were simply idolised. How they worked ! Nothing seemed too hard for them : they cooked and washed and

nursed until they were fairly worn out, always cheering us on, always ready in any emergency ; they seemed to shrink from nothing. Mrs. Cornwallis made no distinction ; it might be the sick baby of an officer's wife or of a private soldier, it was all the same to her ; and as for Floss Bannister, I believe any man in the garrison would have walked straight into the enemy's lines at a word from her. Well, towards the end, Major Gurney was killed, and we thought the shock had killed her too ; but, an hour after we had buried him, she went her rounds as usual. I never shall forget that night ! Creyke and I were on duty together at one of the outposts, with one gun and perhaps a dozen men. We could see the black brutes moving about, but we couldn't hit them.

“ ‘ I've had two shots at one of those black fiends,’ I heard one fellow growl to another, ‘ and I've missed him both times.’

“ ‘ I don't expect we'll have no luck, since Miss Floss has given up comin’—not that we can expect it of her, the darlin’ ; ’ for I must tell you she had been accustomed, in spite of her pressure of work inside the garrison, to visit the outposts every hour or so, ever since the chaplain died. At his death she took up his work where he left it, poor chap, and she stuck to it bravely right up to the time of the major's death. Every hour or so she used to come. Some-

times she sang a hymn, or read a few words, or just said the Lord's Prayer ; if a soldier's wife was ill, and he couldn't get off duty to see her, he might trust Miss Floss to bring him news half-a-dozen times a-day. Well, after the major was killed, we never expected to see her again ; for it had been a terrible blow for her, and they carried her away from his poor body in a dead faint. We hadn't been back long from the funeral, and just as the trooper ended, 'we can't expect it of her, the darlin',' she appeared.

" ' You ought not to have come,' Creyke said to her, reproachfully ; ' no one expected it of you, after such a shock as you have just had.'

" ' My duty is to the living,' she said, in a perfectly calm voice. ' I have done my duty to the dead, and I thank God for it. Major Gurney has shown us all how gloriously we may do our duty, and I will not be the first to sit down and say, "I can struggle no longer."'

" If her tears were dried up Creyke's were not, and he turned away his head that she might not see them ; he had loved her for months, poor chap, and I believe he would have given his life for Gurney's, if he could have taken that dreadful look of suffering out of her eyes. She turned away from him then.

" ' Is Robert Moss here ? ' she asked.

" ' Here miss,' he answered, stepping out from behind another man, with suspiciously wet eyes.

“‘Your wife seems a good deal better,’ she said. ‘I have just seen her, and she sent her love to you.’

“‘Thank you, miss,’ he answered, turning away, with eyes overflowing again; then, in a choked voice, ‘Maybe you’ll give my love to Mary, and say I’ll come in as soon as I can get off.’

“She only stayed a few minutes, and just as she was moving away, a great hulking Irishman ran after her and caught her gown—a great brute, that had been one of the worst scamps in the regiment.

“‘Shure, miss, darlin’,’ he blurted out, ‘ye won’t try to stop the blissid tears from comin’? They’ll do ye a power o’ good, Miss Floss, an’ we can’t bear to see ye look like that.’

“She lifted her soft dark eyes to his for a moment, and then she laid her little work-worn hand in his great fist.

“‘My tears are all burnt up, Michael,’ she said, gratefully; ‘but I shall not forget what you have said to me.’

“And then she went away, and our watch dragged on. Each day, for the past fortnight, we had been sure matters could not get any worse, but somehow they did.

“It was not many days after this that they drove us back from that very outpost, and we were obliged to leave one of our few guns. The command had by

that time fallen upon a man named Hood, a first-rate officer, though still rather young.

“‘It’s a pity to let them have that gun,’ he exclaimed, vexedly. ‘Their fire’s bad enough, but to have our own guns turned against us will be too bad.’

“‘Couldn’t it be spiked, sir?’ Creyke asked.

“‘Yes, of course; only the chances are ten to one against it’s being done: the fire is so heavy there,’ he answered.

“Of course a dozen volunteers stood out immediately, Creyke and I amongst the rest. I was chosen at once, and Creyke insisted upon going too. We were determined that the brutes should not have the gun; but, upon my word, it was anything but pleasant, running right in the face of the enemy’s fire, with only a half-ruined wall for shelter. I can tell you we accomplished our task expeditiously—I know my only idea was how soon I could get out of danger; for we were in almost as much peril from our fellows’ bullets as from the enemy’s, as a continual crossfire was kept up the whole time. Just as we turned for a rush from the shelter of the half-ruined wall, I heard a yell from the black fiends behind us; and before I had gone three yards I came down to the ground with a crash, with what I knew must be a bullet in my shoulder and a second in my hip. Creyke heard only the yell and ran on. I tried

to get up and follow him ; but I fell back, half-fainting with the pain, and shut my eyes, with a feeling that it was all up with me. I don't remember much more, until I found Creyke bending over me with more resolution in his face than I had ever seen in it before.

“ ‘ It’s all right, old chap,’ he said, coolly. ‘ The brutes have winged you, but I’ll have you inside in five minutes.’

“ ‘ Go back, you’ll only get hit yourself,’ I answered.

“ ‘ Can you use your legs ? ’ he asked.

“ ‘ Got a ball in my right hip.’

“ I saw him take out his penknife and begin ripping up a scarf which happened to be lying near, and then I fancy I must have gone off again ; for, the next time I opened my eyes, Floss Bannister was bathing my forehead, and the doctor was bending over me.

“ ‘ You’re a noble fellow, Creyke,’ I heard Hood say. ‘ If we are spared to get out of this, I shall recommend you for the Cross.’

“ ‘ I don’t do it for the Cross,’ I heard him answer, coolly. ‘ I’m glad we prevented those beasts getting the gun, and I couldn’t leave Cotherstone to die out there. I should never have faced his father again, as long as I lived.’

“‘Never mind your reasons,’ Hood said, warmly, ‘they don’t lessen your heroism, whatever they were.’

“‘Creyke came round to us then, and asked if he could help in any way.

“‘Lend me a penknife,’ answered the doctor.

“‘Oh, by Jove ! I’ve left it behind me,’ he said, in a disgusted tone. ‘I’ll run and fetch it.’

“‘You will do nothing of the kind,’ put in Hood, imperatively.

“‘But it’s the only one I have, sir,’ returned Creyke mildly.

“‘I forbid you to go ; I distinctly forbid it.’

“‘Oh, I must go, sir,’ he said, quietly ; ‘I shan’t be a minute.’ And he did so, returning in a few minutes, breathless, but unscathed. ‘Here’s your knife, Doctor,’ he said, as coolly as if he had fetched it out of the hospital.

“‘Now, sir,’ I heard Hood say, sternly—I could only just hear him, for they were trying to move me, and I was turning very sick and faint again—‘you have chosen to disobey my orders, therefore I shall not recommend you for the Cross. It is given for valour, not for foolhardiness.’

“And that was how Creyke missed the V.C.,” he ended.

“And what became of her ?” Mrs. Cotherstone

asked, wiping away her tears, which had been falling plentifully during the recital.

“The last time I heard of her, she was still living with the Cornwallises; and I fancy she would have yielded to Creyke’s prayers, only she promised Gurney just at the last that she would meet him in heaven—Floss Bannister still. Of course, you know, Mary, I don’t mean that she has forgotten him; but perhaps she might have been induced to let Creyke care for her, but for the promise.”

“And Major Creyke?”

“Creyke! Oh, there will never be any one like her for him. He will love her all his life, as he will never love any other human being. I wonder I never told you all this before, darling. I am afraid I’ve been so happy myself that I have never thought of other people’s troubles; and, somehow, I don’t care to look back to the time when I had not found you again.”

Mrs. Cotherstone put her soft hands into her husband’s with a most tender smile upon her fair face. “I hope I may meet her some day, Ned,” she said, earnestly. “I should like to see the woman who saved your life for me; and as for Major Creyke—Ah, now I think, I shall never be able to make enough of him.”

“Only don’t make me jealous,” he interposed.

“And how was it,” she asked presently, “that you came back to the cuirassiers?”

“My darling, at heart we were only volunteers—at least, that is to say, our interests and pride were all centred in the old regiment. We always looked upon ourselves as cuirassiers; and as soon as I had a chance of a troop in the old regiment I took it. The Cornwallisses had left then, for the colonel was too badly wounded to be fit for service again; and, as Floss Bannister was gone, Creyke exchanged at once, though he lost ever so much seniority by doing so.”

“Will he ever marry, do you think?”

“Floss would not have him.”

“Ah, but I meant any one else. Men do such things, you know, Ned.”

“Do you think I could ever have married any one but yourself?” he asked.

“Of course not,” she replied, indignantly.

“Well, then, I don’t think Creyke will either.”



THE CAPTAIN OF F-TROOP.

“Not exactly handsome,” said Captain Dickson, in reply to a question put to him by a brother officer, “but the sort of girl that every second man would turn round to look after.”

“Ah!” returned the other—by name, Gough—comprehensively, and as if he perfectly understood the description, “and what class?”

“Oh! a lady, decidedly,” said Dickson, hastily.

“What a queer thing we’ve never met her,” remarked the other. “Perhaps she’s some parson’s or lawyer fellow’s daughter.”

“Very likely,” said Dickson, indifferently. “She’s a splendid woman, whoever she is. She did fetch me, no mistake about it.”

“Where did you see her?”

“At the Minster; followed her down Coney Street, and then she went up Mickle-gate way.”

“Lives that way, probably,” suggested Gough.

“Probably,” returned Dickson; and then they fell to talking of other things.

But the remembrance of the lady did not fade

from the memory of the man whom she had so favourably impressed. Try as he would, he could not get her out of his head. Whilst he was dressing for mess that evening, her face and attitude kept rising before his eyes, until he was vexed with himself for being such a fool. Still, she was grand, there was no doubt about it. He had gone to afternoon prayers at the Minster partly because he had nowhere else to go, and partly because the anthem announced to be sung was of unusual beauty, and immediately upon entering his attention had been attracted by a lady in the stalls opposite—a young lady, apparently about twenty, with dead-gold hair and a perfectly colourless face. Captain Dickson had eyes keen as any hawk's, and he "spotted" the dead-gold hair and the colourless face instantly; also that she had large dark eyes; to be sure, they might be grey, or even deep blue, but at that distance they had the appearance of dark eyes.

When the service began, and she rose to her feet, his admiration still further increased, for he perceived that she was of magnificent build and proportions. She was clad in some tightly-fitting, soft material, of a dark blue shade, and round her throat, below her plain linen collar, she wore a broad band of gold. Captain Dickson immediately decided in his own mind that dark blue and gold are the most becoming

colours a woman can wear, especially if she chance to have dead-gold hair and a perfectly colourless complexion.

I am afraid he did not attend very much to the service, nor to the anthem which he had gone to hear; his eyes scarcely ever strayed from the grand figure opposite, in the blue dress with the collar of gold. And yet, when the object of his admiration had disappeared over Ouse Bridge, and he had betaken himself back to barracks, snatches of the lovely music kept rising to his lips—

These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Ah! what haunting music it was! Why—he wondered—why, as the emblem of great tribulation, should there rise before him a colourless face framed in dead-gold hair? Surely she could not have come out of great tribulation! It was only a proof of the strange fancies which at times creep into a man's mind. And yet he remembered most vividly how, during the anthem, she had seated herself with what he would swear was a sigh, and, closing her eyes, leant her head back against the carved oak, and remained so until the anthem was ended. It was not a happy gesture—it was the gesture of a woman who, as yet, had not realized the truth of the words they were singing—

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

They shall hunger—no more! Just then, as she sat down, he caught—or he fancied so, which was almost the same—a wistful glance from those dark eyes which told him very plainly that it had not come to her to hunger no more. He was quite right: there are many kinds of hunger.

Three days later he met her in the town, and her face haunted him more than ever—for it had the rare characteristic of being nicer as you approached nearer to it. Captain Dickson had a good look at her, for she never even glanced towards him. He saw that she wore the same dress as he had seen her in before, and that there was a younger girl with her, evidently a sister, from the similarity of costume and also from the striking resemblance of person. True, she was of a brighter, rosier, more lively type, and looked at the tall dark-haired soldier with interest enough; but, to his mind, she was not half so charming as her sister, who took no more notice of him than if he had been some country clod-hopper on a market day, and who seemed to him to be the living personification of that ideal woman of whom the poet sings— .

Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null, dead perfection, no more.

And yet, when he came to think of it, it was hardly an apt description. Each feature was good, and yet

the whole was not handsome—faultily faultless, so far good—the face was cold, it was also regular in outline. Good thus far, but for the next clause he had a different opinion—he could not agree with that: a vision of wistful dark eyes came before his mental vision and a pale face, against a back-ground of dark oak; the face was not null, though the perfection of it might have been described by some people as dead. A great man has said, that every face should be a history or a prophecy: her's contained the history of cruel suffering.

He tried several times to find out who she was, but without success. Then he met her in a shop; on that occasion, her umbrella, which had been set against a chair, was thrown to the ground, and he had the pleasure of picking it up and restoring it to her. She thanked him with a bow and a grave smile, but without speaking. Captain Dickson wished she had spoken; she had, he felt convinced, a sweet voice, as tender as her face and he would have liked to hear it. Presently her sister asked her a question about something she was buying, but still she did not speak, only bent her head. Captain Dickson wondered impatiently if she had guessed how much he wished to hear her voice, and was trying to tantalize him. But no; the utter unconsciousness of the girl's face was a sufficient answer to his question. Had he been a wooden

dummy standing there, she could not have taken less notice of him—nay, had he been a dummy, she might have looked at it.

She moved towards a stand of photographs at the side of the shop, and presently her sister addressed her. “Nell, do you want any of these?” she asked.

Now surely she must answer, thought Dickson, but she did not, only shook her head and turned again to her study of the photographs. How aggravating! Well, he had learnt something—her name was Nell! Nell!—what a lovely name; and then the sisters turned to leave the shop, seeing which Captain Dickson made a rush for the door.

“Permit me,” he said, politely, holding it wide open.

“Thank you,” said the younger sister, but the elder merely bowed again, with another grave smile, the counter-part of that which she had given him before.

“Who are those ladies?” he asked, when they had gone.

“Their name is Vansittart, sir,” the man replied; “they live somewhere on the Mount—Mrs. Vansittart is a widow.”

“Ah! really.” Captain Dickson’s tone implied that he was not much interested in the Vansittart family, yet, for all that, he repeated her name a

hundred times to himself, just for the pleasure of hearing it: "Nell Vansittart." He didn't know when a name had taken him so! He wondered impatiently why she couldn't have spoken—just "thank you," as her sister had said! Surely two words couldn't have been much trouble! And then an idea occurred to him, which made him hold his breath with the very horror of it. Could it be that she was dumb and had not power to speak? Dumb! could that glorious creature be dumb?—dumb as the beasts which perish! Was it that which gave those soft eyes such a speaking language of their own? Could it be that which gave that gravely sweet smile such pathetic eloquence? Oh, heavens!—surely not! Dumb!—why she could not be dumb, for she was not deaf. No, no!—what an idiot he was ever to fancy anything so repulsive, so horrible. He would hasten to dress for mess, that he might go down and forget that so hideous a conception had ever found a place—even for a moment—in his mind.

But still, he could not shake off the painful impression which his conjecture had produced, and his brother-officers were not slow in discovering that something unusual was amiss with him.

"What's the matter with Dickson?" one asked of another.

"Don't know, fallen in love, perhaps," was the reply.

“ Oh ! he’ll get over it,” laughed the one who had spoken first.

“ What does Dickson look so blue about to-night ? ” was asked at another part of the table.

“ Can’t say ; his young woman’s given him the slip, perhaps.”

“ Very likely. I say, Dickson, what’s up ? ”

“ Up ? ” said Dickson, stupidly.

“ Yes, up—wrong—amiss—anything you like ? ”

“ Oh ! nothing.”

“ Has she turned out a failure ? ”

“ She ? ” repeated Dickson, who, having his head full of Nell Vansittart, wondered how Gore could know anything about it.

“ Why, bless my soul, man ! ” cried the other, “ you might as well be deaf and dumb, for all the information one can get out of you.”

Deaf and dumb ! Captain Dickson started so violently at the words that a general laugh went round the table. He did not laugh, only went on quietly eating his dinner.

“ Must be in love,” remarked a young “ sub.” to his neighbour, in tones just loud enough for Dickson to catch. “ And, oh ! by Jove ! what beastly bad *rissoles* these are ! ‘Pon my soul, one might get as good in any cook-shop.”

Captain Dickson looked up, and fixed his cool blue

eyes upon the speaker. “I’ll tell you what it is, young man,” he said, in a quiet, distinct voice, which could well be heard all over the room; “if we have any more of your nonsense about the mess-cookery, *we’ll send you home to rough it for six weeks.*”

“Dickson *may* have fallen in love,” said one man *sotto voce* to another, “but his tongue’s as caustic and his wit as keen as ever it was.”

N.B.—Before I go on with my story, I may as well remark that the dissatisfied “sub.” did not venture to open his mouth during the rest of the evening.

Well, not many days after this, the yeomanry ball came off. Captain Dickson went in good time, just on the chance of the Vansittarts being there. As a reward, he had not been in the room five minutes before he perceived the younger of the sisters standing near one of the pillars, in animated conversation with a yeomanry officer. He went straight across the room and asked for an introduction, and having obtained her card, put his name down for the next dance. It was a waltz, and he enjoyed it. The girl was pretty, well-dressed and a good waltzer; moreover, he was looking forward to being introduced to her sister.

“Perhaps you will introduce me to your sister,” he said, when she suggested returning to her mother.

“My sister is not here,” she answered.

“Indeed! How is that? I hope she is not ill?”

“Oh, no; but—she does not visit;” and then, having secured another dance, he was obliged to leave her.

She does not visit. Yes, that was what she said. There was not the slightest doubt about her words or her meaning—she does not visit. What could there be to prevent her from visiting? There must be some cause, he argued; young women of twenty, or thereabouts, don’t shun the world’s pleasures without some very good cause. Then what could that cause be? He danced once or twice with her sister and discovered that her name was Constance; that since their father’s death they had lived in Edinburgh, and that they had only been in York a few months. Miss Constance could not say whether they were likely to remain long or not—she thought not; but it would depend chiefly upon her sister.

“I wonder,” said Captain Dickson, in his most deferential tone—“I wonder if you would be offended if I asked you a very impertinent question?”

“You had better ask it and see,” she returned, with a laugh. “What is it?”

“I have seen you and your sister in the town

once or twice," he answered ; " and I should like to know why she does not visit."

Miss Constance looked down at her gloves, tore a flower from her bouquet, destroyed it, looked up hesitatingly, as if his question was an unwelcome one, and then looked down again.

" If you would rather not answer it, pray say so," he answered, gently. " It was really a most impertinent thing to ask."

" No, no, not at all," she said, hastily. " The fact is, Captain Dickson, my sister had a misfortune a few months ago, and we have never been able to persuade her to go into society since."

" Oh, yes ; I understand," he answered.

But understand he decidedly did not ! A misfortune ! It had an ominous sound about it which he did not like at all. A misfortune ! " Why, bless me," he thought, " there can't be anything wrong with her morals ; and what could it be else to make her withdraw entirely from the world ? "

She was right in her head, that was very certain ; then what could it be ?

The following day he walked up towards the Mount, hoping to meet them—meaning the Vansittarts. Just outside Micklegate Bar, he saw them in the distance, coming towards him. He stopped and held out his hand to Constance, Miss Vansittart walked composedly on.

And thus during several weeks were his efforts baffled. At length she gave up going into the town with her sister in the afternoon, and, once or twice, when he had contrived to get himself asked in to have a cup of tea, she never went into the room ; once, he just caught sight of the tail of her gown, and a glimpse of her dead-gold hair, but to him she was a very will-o'-the-wisp : it seemed absolutely impossible to reach her presence. But still he did not give up his object ; he was determined to know her, and at last he succeeded, for one day he went in with Constance, and entered the room too suddenly for her to escape.

“ Let me introduce Captain Dickson, Nell,” said Constance : “ My sister—Captain Dickson.”

Being in her own house, Miss Vansittart could not well avoid laying her hand in Captain Dickson’s outstretched palm, and, having done that, she could not immediately leave the room as she would have liked.

“ How very cold it is to-day,” he said, addressing himself pointedly to her.

Again that little grave bow : he was non-plussed.

“ I’ll ask her a question,” he thought, then said aloud, “ Do you skate at all ? ”

“ I do not,” she answered, flushing vividly as she spoke.

He understood it all in a moment. Those three words had told him what it was that Constance had called "a misfortune." Miss Vansittart had, through some accident, lost her voice, and could not speak above a whisper. All his soldierly tact and polish came to his aid now. He would not let her feel ill at ease with him. He took a seat beside her and talked away as fluently and pleasantly as if young ladies who could not speak above a whisper very often came in his way, and presently, when Constance went to take her hat off, and Mrs. Vansittart left the room for a moment, he remarked, coolly, "Do you know, Miss Vansittart, I have been trying to make your acquaintance for ever so long?"

"Yes, I know," in that strange whispering voice, which thrilled his very soul's inmost recesses, "but—I—never see people."

"Yes, I understand exactly. Of course I didn't know until this evening, but I understand now. You won't keep out of my way again, will you?" he asked, persuasively.

"But—," she began, hesitatingly, "is not my voice very disagreeable to you?"

"Disagreeable!" he echoed, "no, indeed; I don't admire your screaming women, whose tongues go five-and-twenty to the dozen until you are deafened."

"I always feel so reluctant to speak," she con-

tinued, "for some people look astonished, and others smile, as if there could be anything amusing in having lost one's voice—in such a deprivation."

"When people display a visible lack of brains you should be lenient, Miss Vansittart," he said, gravely.

"Yes, perhaps ; only one is apt to think only of one's self," she answered.

Then the others returned. Poor Mrs. Vansittart was so charmed to see Nell interested and pleased once more, that she could not make enough of the man who had wrought the change. He lingered until the irate cook was only forcibly restrained from rushing up stairs to give him a piece of her mind—not a small piece by any means ; but at last he did take his leave.

Mrs. Vansittart followed him out into the hall, "I don't know how to express my gratitude to you," she said, "I have not seen Nell so bright and like herself since she met with the accident which deprived her of her voice ; and, you know"—with a sound of tears in her tones—"you know what that must be to her mother."

"Mrs. Vansittart," he said, quietly, "I wish you would give me a general invitation to come here."

"With all my heart."

"Thank you much," he answered, heartily, and, pressing her hand, departed.

He was too late for mess, but he had some dinner in his room, and went into the ante-room afterwards. He found there one or two strangers who had been dining at mess—strangers to him, that is to say. One of them was speaking as he entered the room :

“ Have any of you met some people called Vansittart—a mother and two daughters? I heard they had come to York.”

“ What makes her keep out of sight now? ” someone asked.

“ Oh! poor girl! She was engaged to Towers-Brooke, of the Drab Horse, and just about a year ago we were all staying at Bullidean—Gylglen’s place. Well, Miss Vansittart—Nell, every one called her—slipped into a deep brook one afternoon, and got soaked to the skin. We tried to persuade her to go into a cottage and get dried there, but she persisted in driving home—some six miles. Towers-Brooke was always a queer-tempered fellow, and, of course, he was anxious about her, but he told her—roughly enough, and before all of us—that if she didn’t do as she was told, he would never speak to her again. She didn’t hesitate a minute: a dog-cart was standing by, so she jumped in and drove off by herself. Towers-Brooke never said a word, he drove the drag back to Bullidean, with a regular pack inside—for four had gone in the dog-cart—and he never

once opened his mouth the whole way ; I happen to know that, because I sat next to him. We reached the house about six o'clock, and he was off to London at seven, without his dinner even. Mrs. Gylglen was rather vexed about it, but Nell Vansittart was taken so ill with some lung complaint that no one had time to talk or think of anything else, and the end of it was, that she lost her lover and her voice—hard upon her, poor girl!"

"He wouldn't be much loss," remarked one of the audience.

"I think she was fond of him," returned the guest, in a musing tone, "and there was no doubt whatever about Towers-Brooke's feelings, only he was one of those determined chaps that would keep his word if it spoilt his whole life, and killed him in the end."

"Oh ! one of your pig-headed brutes," drawled a cuirassier, who had not been particularly charmed by the description of Mr. Towers-Brooke, "or what some people call 'firm.'"

"Yes, exactly."

"Ah ! well, I think Miss Vansittart has done well to get out of it. Men of that calibre are all very well in story books, but they are the very devil to live with. I happen to know, because my old governor's one of the sort ; if I were a woman, I'd rather marry ever such a fool."

“A clever sort of chap,” put in another.

“Clever as daylight,” responded the guest, “as clever as daylight. I dined with the Drab Horse on the day of their last steeple-chases, when Brooke had ridden a horse of Jefferson’s and won the cup, which was open to the army. Of course they made a great fuss about it, and toasted the horse; then they called for the owner, and Jefferson got up in the most approved style, laid his hand on his heart and bowed on all sides. They thought they were going to get a speech out of him, but they couldn’t, so they called for the jockey. Towers-Brooke got up and made his bow.

“‘I think my master has said enough for both of us,’ said he, and sat down again.”

“Very good,” laughed the cuirassiers *en masse*.

“And that same night,” he continued, “old Fitz-Hugh, who was colonel at that time, by way of mixing the company, had asked the R. C. priest to meet the chaplain and another parson. The introduction opened the proceedings: the chaplain, an enormously fat man, very bald and urbane, was walked up to the priest as soon as he entered the room.

“‘Oo-o,’ said the colonel—you know his extraordinary way of speaking—‘Oo-o—let me introduce you to my very good friend, Father O’Reilly.’

“I never saw a man’s face fall as his did in my life ; if old Fitz-Hugh had presented him to the devil himself—horns and ‘hoof and all—his bow couldn’t have been more solemn or his face have expressed greater disgust. The priest, who was a jolly sort of chap, saw the joke in a minute. Well, the other parson had just arrived in time to see the meeting between the two, so old Fitz-Hugh took the priest’s arm and led him across the room.

“‘Oh ! Lloyd, Oo-o—let me introduce you to my very good friend, Father O’Reilly.’

“He looked back at us, as he spoke, to see if we all fully appreciated the crowning point of his little jest, but, to the general disgust, the new-comer held out a hand, with a hearty ‘How are you, O’Reilly?’

“‘How are ye, me dear fellow?’ returned the priest.

“‘Oo-o’ gasped Fitz-Hugh ; ‘then you know Father O’Reilly? Oo-o !’

“‘Sure, yis. Me good friend Lloyd often comes an’ smokes a pipe with me,’ answered the priest.

“I really don’t know whether the roar of laughter which followed was at the colonel’s *done* look or at the righteous horror on the chaplain’s fat face. Perhaps it was at the remark with which the Irishman finished up the colonel’s little plot.

“‘I’m always deloighted to meet any friend of

yours, colonel,' he said, taking a glass of sherry and bitters from the tray as he spoke, 'but I make a rhule of drawing the line *after* the Establishment.'

"And now we must be going, Russell," he said, rising, "or your wife will be locking us out."

Captain Dickson, after a while, went up to his room in a strangely meditative mood. There was a roaring fire blazing up the chimney and a newspaper lying on the table. He sat down in his accustomed chair, for the first time since he had joined the army, thoroughly dissatisfied with his life. All at once it seemed to have grown utterly distasteful to him. He looked round the little room, with eyes no longer blind to the many makeshifts and shabbinesses which it contained. There were the common deal legs of the table protruding from beneath the torn, stained cloth which covered it; there was the usual make-believe dressing-table, with its cretonne hangings, and the petticoated chairs—how his soul loathed them!—and there in the corner, with which regularly every morning he barked his shins, was the big bath, with huge patches of paint knocked off; and there were the window curtains, which made a point of coming down every time he tried to draw them. Hitherto he had merely suffered all these things because he felt it was not worth while to have anything better, to be at the mercy of soldier servants

and railway porters ; but, somehow, of late a great craving had taken possession of him—a craving for a home : a home in the country, with decent hunting and shooting ; with pleasant society, where there would be no practical jokes nor after-dinner songs, such as he could hear them singing in the ante-room at that moment—

Oh ! my Jem—Jemima,
She's left her loving Sam !
And gone to be a Mormonite,
In new Jerusalem.

Ugh ! how sick he was of it all. No wonder : he had heard Gore sing that song almost every night for the last five years. He invariably got on a chair and see-sawed his arms up and down whilst he sang it. He didn't know, or rather he never attempted, any other, and he could not be said to *know* that. Oh, how weary he was of it all ! The stale jokes ! He knew every one's story, and just at what part of the evening it would be brought in. A new story or joke was a perfect godsend to them ! Would they never grow tired of trying how much mustard and pepper Martin could take without finding out his food had been tampered with ? Would they never cease to treat old Barber's bald head as a round of toast, and butter it ? Would they never discover that life may be of better worth than turning men out

of their beds as soon as they have got comfortably into them, and marching them about draughty corridors in scanty attire, at the risk of rheumatic fever and lung complaints? He wondered, with a long sigh, how he had managed to live to thirty years of age without finding all this out? It was because—and his heart told him the reason quickly enough—he had never taken a fancy for a country house and a wife who should have dead-gold hair and a colourless complexion.

He leant back in his chair and gave himself up to the pleasure of contemplating his castle, which, as yet, was *in nubibus*. How different it would all be. What long, quiet cosy evenings they would have together. She must sit always close beside him, else he would not be able to hear what she said—the girl he loved—the girl with the strange whispering voice and the serious eyes, with their wistful, pained expression. Curse the fellow who brought that shadow into them! And yet, if things had been otherwise, Nell Vansittart would be to him as nothing. He must not forget that.

There was one thing, however, that he forgot completely—or no, he could not be said to forget it, for the idea had never presented itself to his mind—that was, that it was possible Miss Vansittart might not find herself able to care for him as he cared for her,

nor did he admit, even to his own mind, that it was probable. She still cherished some of the old tenderness for the man who had once loved her—Towers-Brooke.

George Dickson never thought of these possibilities and probabilities, so they did not trouble him. For the next few weeks he went on his roseate way with a brave joyous heart and eyes which saw not the tiniest cloud upon the horizon of his future. Day by day he found his way to Mrs. Vansittart's house, and with each visit Nell was more gracious to him, more at ease, more friendly, until at last he summoned up courage, when one afternoon he found her alone, to unfold to her his glowing visions of the future.

“ You care for me ? ” she repeated, incredulously.

“ Yes, dear ; is there anything astonishing in that ? ” he said, with a tender smile.

“ Oh ! Captain Dickson ! ” she gasped, her whispering voice growing louder because of her pain, “ indeed, I never thought of this—I expected it was Constance.”

“ Oh no ; it is yourself.”

“ But I never thought of it ! ”

“ Will you not think of it now ? ” he pleaded.

“ Oh—no, no ! ”—it would be hard to say whether the pain in eyes, or voice, or face, was the keenest—“ you do not understand ; you do not know.”

He guessed instantly that she was thinking of Towers-Brooke. "I know all about the man who treated you like the hound he is," he said, savagely.

"Don't say it," she said, holding out her hands imploringly; "I cannot, will not hear a word against him."

"You love him still?" he asked, incredulously.

"Love him!" she repeated, heedless of the pain she was inflicting, "oh! how I do love him—still."

"You would take him back—now?" Dickson asked.

"Take him back!" she echoed, "oh yes, indeed—if he came to me maimed and tattered, crippled and blind, deaf and dumb, I would still take him back gladly; but," with a sad smile, "he will not—he will keep his word."

And then he left her.

It was all over. He went back to his barrack-room and hated it worse than ever. He had thought to escape from it all, but he had been mistaken. There it all was: the stained table-cloth, the deal legs of the table, the sentries pacing up and down outside, Gore singing in his room next door—

Oh! my Jem—Jemima,
She's left her loving Sam,
And gone to be a Mormonite
In new Jerusalem.

There was the quarter-master's baby squalling just

across the corridor, and the adjutant's wife scolding her servant. There was that poor devil, Calcraft, in the hospital, and the man he had got in his place knew as much about varnishing boots as he did about making mince-pies. He was thumping at the door at that moment.

“Sergeant-Major Lucas wants to speak to you, sir.”

“Very well.” What could that be for? Nothing to do with Calcraft, for he was safe in hospital. He had a good mind to cut it all, but for the present he was obliged to hear what Lucas had to say: for, however ill the world used him, he was still the Captain of F-troop.



THE SIGN OF THE “GOLDEN SWAN.”

HE made a very bad senior sub., there was no doubt about it. In the first place, he had ten names, a circumstance which told against him; in the second, he had a great many distinguished relations, and as these “salt of the earth” were not permitted to remain quietly at home with their wives, but were ostentatiously paraded on every occasion as, “Getty, my cousin, you know,” or “Sir Lucian Boodsworth, my old uncle,” and a dozen such others, they told against him likewise. As the cuirassiers—those who were as distinguished and those who were not—frequently said, it is doubtless a fine thing to be fifth cousin to an earl—called, for shortness, Getty—and to have an uncle in Parliament, with the additional charms of being a baronet and a millionaire: still, even of those good things, *other* people might have too much.

Then also he had no money, and he had, worst of all, a mother! Yes! he had a mother, and she called him “Lucy.” Now, since he possessed such a superabundance of names, she might as well have called him by any of the others, but, by one of the absurd

freaks of coddling love which some mothers indulge in, she called him "Lucy;" his brother officers called him "The Alphabet;" his name, however, in all its glory, shone thus—Lucian Boodsworth John George Lawrence Gettandine Sholto Montague Cosmo Abdy—ten of them—and his mother called him "Lucy," and his brother officers "The Alphabet."

Mr. Abdy was an only child, indeed, at the time at which the little incident I am going to relate took place, he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, Mr. Abdy *père* having died some fifteen years previously, to the very great detriment of his son's bringing-up!

He was not ornamental, and he was certainly not useful; in person he was singularly unprepossessing: his height was considerably over six feet, and in width he might be, perhaps, about one-sixth of his height—barely twelve inches; his shoulders were of the class known as "champagne," in truth, they were so very much of the champagne order that he seemed to have no shoulders at all, only an enormously long neck, to which, somehow, his arms were attached; he had also remarkably long legs, slightly inclined to knock about the knees; and, to crown all these charms, he had a foolish round face, with boiled-gooseberry eyes and white eye-lashes, a nondescript

nose, a huge mouth, bad teeth, and a mop—a perfect mop—of curly flame-coloured hair.

So much for his personal appearance! now for his accomplishments. Well, he had a personal appearance, though to be sure it was not much of a one to look at, but accomplishments—he had none! Shoot—he couldn't. To many other pursuits the same description accurately applied—to polo, cricket, riding, swimming, and indeed to most of the hundred-and-one amusements to which soldiers devote themselves. He was once known to drive the drag back to the Blankhampton barracks, the others having stayed in the town, and on reaching his destination was hailed by an impudent young sub., who hadn't quite got licked into shape, with "Hollo! Abdy, what have you done with the others?—killed 'em all, eh?" To finish the list of Mr. Abdy's charms, I need only add that he wore his hat on one side, and faneied every woman he met was in love with him; now there was no doubt whatever about the hat, but as for the other—

Oh! wad some power the giftie gie us
To see ousrels as ither see us;
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
And foolish notion.

The euirassiers had been quartered in Blankhampton nearly a year, and had naturally made a large circle of friends in the town and neighbour-

hood. Shortly after Christmas Mrs. Abdy arrived, and took up her abode in private lodgings, announcing her intention of remaining some time—several months, at least.

Her first proceeding was to take advantage of her son's absence at a house in the vicinity, where he had gone for a couple of days' hunting, to go up to the barracks with her maid, and—what she called—"put poor dear Lucy's things tidy," to the intense delight of such of the officers as were in the barracks.

Now probably the last person a cavalry officer would like to set loose in his rooms would be his mother—excepting, perhaps, his sweetheart—and "poor dear Lucy," not dreaming that such an onslaught would be made during his absence, had left everything in the utmost disorder, it having never occurred to him that such an idea would present itself to the old lady's mind. The very first thing, therefore, that she was enabled to do was to read his love letters, the result of which was that she indignantly declined offers of help in her self-imposed task from any of the officers, and betook herself back to her lodgings, without having put any of "poor dear Lucy's" things straight at all, having, in truth, left them rather more untidy than she had found them.

Having thought the matter over, with the help of her luncheon and a glass or two of sherry, Mrs. Abdy came to the conclusion that the sooner she could get "Lucy" married the better. That happened to be exactly "Lucy's" own opinion, and, like his mother, he, too, inserted a clause in the matrimonial scheme—the clause was *money*. What he wanted was youth, beauty, birth, amiability, talent, style, and money. Those were what he *wanted*. What, however, he had made up his mind to have was money—as many of the others as he could get, but money first and foremost. He had tried a good many young ladies with the requisite amount of gilding, but, unfortunately, he had not been able to induce them to see things in the same light as himself. Young ladies who have twelve or fifteen hundred a-year of their own have usually an exalted opinion of themselves, and look for a little, or, if they marry a poor man, they take care he is something to look at, at all events.

Up to the time of the opening of this story Mr. Abdy had been evidently unappreciated, for he was a bachelor still.

The more his old mother turned the matter over in her mind the more puzzled did she become, and at last she put on her hat—she was sixty-five at least, but she wore a hat—and sallied

out for a promenade down the High Street. She had walked the length of the narrow street, and, having crossed over the road, was proceeding leisurely back, by the other side, when a voice exclaimed,

"Why, can that be you, Mrs. Abdy? Who would have thought of seeing you in Blankhampton?"

"Mrs. Chillingly!" cried Mrs. Abdy, in as great astonishment, "and who would have thought of seeing you, indeed?"

"Ah, who indeed? I'll tell you how it is. My daughter is perfectly wild about hunting, and having tried all the other hunting districts in England, I think, made up her mind that she should never be happy until she had had a few weeks with the Blankhampton Hunt. It ended, of course, in our coming, and she has gone out for her first run this morning."

"Then have you taken a house?"

"Oh, dear no! We are at the 'Golden Swan'—a very comfortable hotel, too. I want to go as far as the Post Office; will you walk with me, and then come back and have a cup of tea?"

"Thanks, very many," returned Mrs. Abdy, willingly.

"And what has brought you into this part of the world?" Mrs. Chillingly inquired.

"Oh, Lucy's regiment is here. My son, you know."

"Oh, really! Very nice for you. I suppose you are in lodgings?"

"Yes," she answered, "my son has gone to stay a couple of days at Sir Hugh Brooke's—the great iron people, you know; but he will be back this afternoon."

"I never met him," remarked Mrs. Chillingly. "I never was so surprised as when I saw you walking quietly along."

This was just the chance Mrs. Abdy had been looking for. Miss Chillingly was an heiress; her father had been something in the cotton-spinning line, and had left three hundred thousand pounds between his wife and daughter. She was young, very pretty, a splendid horsewoman, and a charming girl. Could anything be devised to suit "Lucy" better?"

For the next few weeks her whole attention was devoted to the task of bringing the two together. "Lucy" himself was more than willing. Rosey Chillingly seemed very well pleased at his attentions, and Mrs. Chillingly, whose influence went for a good deal in Mrs. Abdy's calculations, having become utterly tired of being dragged about the country at her daughter's sweet will, was charmed at the idea.

She didn't in the least care who Rosey married so long as he was a gentleman, and of "Lucy's" family there could be no question.

Amongst the officers of the cuirassiers the marriage was spoken of as a settled thing; they were expecting every evening that Abdy would announce the news; but one afternoon an accidental carelessness made just all the difference in the true state of the case—in this wise: Miss Chillingly was not entirely unknown to the regiment—indeed, with one of the officers, Mr. Bernard, there had been some very, very tender love passages, which had been broken off through a misunderstanding—broken off and never quite cleared up. It happened that when she was returning from a long day's hunting, with "Lucy" in close attendance and her groom behind, Geoffry Bernard had overtaken them, and, seeing a certain softness in Rosey's face and a certain defiant swagger in Abdy's manner, he greeted her and rode on with them. He fancied—could it be all fancy?—that she seemed suddenly relieved, and at parting he was bold enough to ask, in an undertone, if he might call on the following day?

"Surely," said the girl, turning a pair of brilliant blue eyes up wistfully; "come in and have a cup of tea. My mother will be delighted."

Then he thanked her, and with Abdy, who had

not overheard the little arrangement, slowly rode back to barracks.

But although "Lucy" had not overheard the conversation between Rosey and Bernard, he knew the latter well enough to be aware that he was more than inclined to go in on his own account, and he determined on the morrow to have the whole thing settled and done with one way or another. What was the use, he argued, of shilly-shallying any longer? Faint heart ne'er won fair lady—and a good deal more.

"Walk down into town with me, Abdy?" said Bernard, suddenly, as they entered the gates.

"All right; come round to my rooms when you are ready," he replied.

After all, it would be as well not to lose sight of Bernard during the next few hours.

So presently Bernard went round to Abdy's rooms—he had been lucky enough to secure two.

"Ready, Abdy?"

"Not quite," returned a voice from the inner room, and evidently from behind a towel. "Shan't be a minute."

Now Geoffry Bernard was very much in love, and considered all things fair in love and war; therefore, seeing a letter lying open on the blotting-

pad, he made no more of reading it than if it had been his own. Dishonourable, of course it was, but true for all that! It was not long, and the ink was still wet :

MY DEAR MISS CHILLINGLY,

Will you meet me at the Seven Willows to-morrow afternoon at three o'clock? I want to ask you a very important question, and at your hotel one is never free from interruptions. Devotedly yours,

L. B. J. G. L. G. S. M. C. Abdy.

"How the deuce does he remember them all?" murmured Geoffry Bernard, as he strolled to the pier-glass and began admiring himself. When, a few minutes later, Abdy entered, Bernard was resting his arms upon the chimney-shelf and his forehead upon his arms, staring into the fire in the brownest of brown studies.

"Asleep, old man?" Abdy asked.

"Very nearly," with a start and a laugh. "What tiring work hunting is."

"Awfully so," returned Abdy, folding the letter up and directing it.

But all the same, Geoffry had not kept very closely to the truth when he said he was nearly asleep; he never was further off from sleep in the whole of his life. His quick brain was busy, and the result of his cogitations was that, when they got down to the club, he wrote a note, and the effect of the

note startled the whole of Blankhampton the following morning in such a manner as had not happened for years. In this way: the hotel of the "Golden Swan" was in the centre of the principal street of the town, a narrow thoroughfare, having barely room for two carriages to pass; the business of the hotel having increased, the owner had secured the house opposite to the original one, and thus the hotel was in two parts, one on each side of the street. In order to attract notice, he had over either entrance door a huge gilded swan, and extending across the street from one house to the other, a sign about a foot broad and placed about sixteen feet from the ground, thus:



Well might the respectable inhabitants of Blankhampton be startled the following morning, when in the *Blankhampton Daily Herald* they read the following announcement:

A LONG JUMP.—We understand that Mr. L. B. J. G. L. G. S. M. C. Abdy, of the euirassiers, has undertaken to clear the sign of the "Golden Swan" without assistance of any kind. See advert.

Of course everyone turned eagerly from the local news to the advertisement sheet. Yes; there it was:

THE SIGN OF THE "GOLDEN SWAN."—Lieutenant Aldy, of the cuirassiers, will jump the above sign, IN FULL UNIFORM, at 3 o'clock this (Wednesday) afternoon.

The public are invited to attend!

Had Colonel Cotherstone been at home, Bernard's *ruse* would not have succeeded so well. As it was, no notice was taken of it, for the major was not out of barracks during the morning, and Bernard took good care that the paper containing the announcement should not come within his reach. Mrs. Abdy was away, having gone to visit the Brookes—"the great iron people, you know"—and so at half-past two "Lucy" went quietly out of barracks to keep his appointment with Miss Chillingly. Just about that time a little regiment of upholsterers were busy laying down straw and mattresses in order to break the fall. The windows of all the houses and the hotel were full of ladies; there was a crowd of gentlemen about the steps of the hotel and at the coffee room windows, and *the public* had gathered in great force in the street itself.

"What does it all mean?" exclaimed Rosey, as Geoffry Bernard entered their sitting-room about twenty minutes to three.

"Haven't you seen the papers?"

"The London papers—yes."

"The *Blankhampton Daily Herald*, I mean," he answered, taking a copy out of his pocket and pointing to the advertisement.

As Miss Chillingly read, an angry light came into her eyes, and she bit her lips nervously. So Mr. Lucian had simply been trying to make a fool of her. Well, thank goodness, she had not intended to go.

She laid the paper down and walked to the window, whither Geoffry followed her.

"He will never jump over *that*," she said, with a look at the sign.

"I should think not," Geoffry answered.

"Why is he going to attempt it?"

"I really cannot say."

And so they waited and waited, until three of the clock struck—the hero of the day did not appear. The crowd began to grow impatient; so did Rosey Chillingly.

"Is he coming, do you think?" she asked at last.

"I daresay not," said Geoffry, coolly. "He has a trick of forgetting his appointments."

Again she turned to the window with that sudden flush upon her face. Geoffry took advantage of it.

"Rosey," he said, in a low tone (they were alone,

for Mrs. Chillingly had gone out of the room to fetch something), "can you forgive me for what took place two years ago? It has made me very unhappy."

"Has it?"

Then somehow his arms found their way round her, and she felt his passionate kisses upon her lips. Poor "Alphabet," waiting savagely in the wind about the Seven Willows, was quite forgotten by both of them, until a series of groans and hisses from without recalled them to what was going on in the street.

"They have given him up," she cried; "the men are taking the mattresses away. Oh, I do believe, Geoffry, it is all a hoax!" At which Geoffry burst out laughing.

Yes; it was all a hoax. Towards five o'clock Mr. Abdy found his way into the room to see the lovers sitting together on the sofa and Mrs. Chillingly busy writing a letter. Unfortunately, the homely comfort in the cosy room was too much for him, and he lost his temper.

"Of course, you have had a fine view of all this foolery that has been going on," he said to Rosey.

"Well, we saw the preparations and the crowd," she answered; "but you never came—why did you not?"

"It is a hoax," he almost shouted. "I have been nearly mobbed on my way here; but, never mind, I know whom to thank for it, and I'll be even with him yet," at which Geoffry burst into a fit of smothered laughter.

"Oh, don't be angry," the girl said, soothingly. "If it was only meant as a joke, you should take it as such. 'Give and take,' you know, should be the motto for the army." But well-meant as her sympathy undoubtedly was, the sight of "Lucy's" livid face and flaming eyes was too much for her, and she, too, relapsed into a perfect agony of hilarity, in the midst of which the enraged officer rushed out of the house.

"I hope I shall never see him again," she laughed, "for I shall never be able to keep a grave face. Oh! won't he pay you out for this?"

"Not he," returned Geoffry, carelessly, "because I shall not give him the chance."

After dinner that evening he announced his engagement to his comrades, receiving the congratulations of every one present excepting Abdy.

"Won't you wish me joy, Abdy?" he asked.

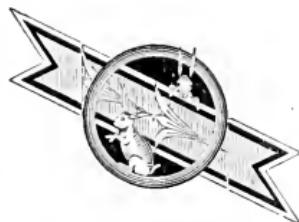
"No, sir; and, what is more, I shall report this disgraceful hoax to the colonel to-morrow," he thundered.

"Very well," returned Bernard, carelessly. "You

might as well be pleasant about it, for I shall leave the regiment immediately; and, if it's any comfort to you to know it, you never had a chance from the first."

That was quite true, but during his whole life Lucian Abdy cherished the most bitter hatred against his successful rival, and if any one desired to throw him into a transport of rage he had only to mention the hoax, which, as he thought, cost him the heiress—

THE SIGN OF THE "GOLDEN SWAN!"



HUMPTY-DUMPTY.

WHEN he first joined the regiment he was called “Fatima,” but before very long his *nom de fantasia* was changed to “Waugh.” However, just before he obtained his troop, an incident took place which gave rise to a third sobriquet—that of “Humpty-Dumpty;” all three names suited him fairly well: “Fatima,” for he was frightfully obese; “Waugh,” because it was the expression most often on his lips; “Humpty-Dumpty”—but no, that requires a story to itself!

The regiment was the Drab Horse, and had succeeded the 52nd Dragoons at Mollington, where they became great favourites with all the people round about, and that, mind, was a very great credit to them, for the departure of the 52nd had been looked upon almost in the light of a public calamity, and the good folks of the neighbourhood regarded the newcomers with anything but favourable eyes, until their unaffected pleasantness won for them as golden opinions as Mollington had ever bestowed upon any regiment before.

The yeomanry ball was over, the two county gatherings—the hunt and the officers—had both done their duty, and there had been private dances *ad libitum*, but the neighbourhood was not satisfied—they wanted a fancy ball!

“Have you heard about the fancy ball?” Hills asked at mess one evening.

“No, what fancy ball?” said Paget.

“There’s to be one on St. Valentine’s day,” he answered.

“Subscription?” some one asked.

“Of course, at the assembly rooms.”

“Awfully jolly!—what shall you go as?” cried Hartley.

“Never thought of it; I suppose we shall be obliged to make asses of ourselves—uniforms not admitted.”

“Quite right, too,” put in a third man, warmly; “I always myself thought uniform a scurvy way of getting out of it—nearly as bad as pink.”

“I say, Jimmy,” Hills called out, “what are you going as?”

“Waugh,” returned Jimmy Desmond, scornfully.

“Oh! as ‘Waugh;’ well, my man, keep on eating Bath chaps at the rate you’ve done lately, and you’ll be able to do the part to perfection,” Hills laughed. “’Pon my word,” he added, *sotto voce*, “it won’t be

long before he turns into a veritable pig, that 'Waugh' of his is inimitable."

"I know—a—chawictaw that would suit 'Waugh' to per—fection," drawled a high-toned deliberate voice from the other end of the room, "suit him—down to—the ground."

"What is it?" Hartley asked.

"Hump—ty-Dump—ty," returned Carruthers, coolly, and continuing his dinner as unmoved by the roar of laughter which followed his suggestion as if he had remarked that the day was cold, and no one had taken any notice of it.

"Waugh," exclaimed Desmond, savagely, "I think 'Champagne Charlie' would suit you as well as anything."

Carruthers looked up deliberately, and settled his glass so as to "fix" the speaker; the others waited in silence to hear what the smooth silver tongue would rap out—more than equal to the occasion, they were sure.

"My dear—chap," he said, calmly, "Champagne Charlie in the owiginal—er—was—ah—a vivacious—person! Now my deadliest enemy—ah! excuse the twagie element—could hardly accuse—*me*—of being vivacious."

"By George, no!" put in Hills, amid a roar of laughter.

“ And ‘Champagne Charlie’ was—undeniably—a cad—and I weally don’t think,” he went on, plaintively, “ that I am—a cad.”

“ Perhaps you intends to go as Hadonis?” put in a rough voice, from the extreme end of the table—it belonged to the quarter-master.

Carruthers turned his melancholy dark eyes upon the speaker, with just the faintest expression of contempt on his handsome face.

“ Ah ! no—I had—some thoughts of—er—taking your *rôle*—that is, if you don’t mind lending it to me, once in a way.”

“ Oh ! no, not at all ! what is it ? ” Groves replied, seeing his way to what might be a good thing.

It was a good thing, but scarcely in the way he expected, for after a long pause, Carruthers said gently,

“ I—er—thought of going—*as—sixty—per cent !* And I fancy I had the bwute there,” he added in an undertone, for the benefit of the others, who—most of them—knew what it was to borrow money from the gentleman in question, at something like *sixty per cent.* interest.

As the days passed by, the fancy ball was the subject uppermost in every one’s thoughts, and many were the suggestions for “ Waugh’s ” costume :

one thought the “Fat boy in Pickwick,” another “Magog”—only where was Gog to come from, the Drab Horse not being able to produce him?

“Waugh,” however, put all their ideas to flight by announcing grandly that he intended to go as *Cœur de Lion*!

“*Cœur de Lion?*” repeated Carruthers, for once taken aback.

“Bless my soul!” put in Hills again.

“Take my advice, Carruthers,” quoth “Waugh,” drily, “and go as ‘Champagne Charlie,’ ” and then he bolted out of the room before any of the men assembled could answer him.

“*Cœur de Lion*,” Carruthers said again; “but—oh, by—Jove!—you never shall.”

In his desire to be emphatic he was quite eager, he almost forgot his drawl.

Captain Carruthers said nothing more upon the subject that afternoon. It wanted but three days to the ball, and many were the speculations as to how he would manage to prevent Desmond from being present in the character of *Cœur de Lion*; that he might be unable to do so never occurred to them—they knew him too well for that.

That evening Carruthers sat next to Desmond at dinner, a most unusual circumstance.

“Carruthers means mischief,” remarked one officer

to another, "just watch him keep filling up 'Waugh's' glass every time he turns his head."

"'Waugh'"s screwed already," responded the other.

But Desmond proved that he was not more than half-seas-over, and, as the re-filling process went steadily on, he very soon showed that he was *all*-seas-over by rising to make a speech, and after stammering out "Gentlemen, I—I—" collapsed, all of a lump, under the table.

"The beast's drunk again," said Carruthers, disdainfully; "here, some of you fellows, get him off to bed."

So off half-a-dozen men carried him, swinging him up and down, and shouting at the top of their healthy voices—

With a hilly-huilee, hilly-haulee, *Ho!*

* * * * *

"Officers' call" had just sounded, and the officers of the Drab Horse had assembled in the orderly room.

"Where is Mr. Desmond?" asked the chief.

Mr. Desmond was not forthcoming, that was evident.

"Orderly, go and let Mr. Desmond know that 'officers' call' has sounded."

The orderly departed hastily, and, after an absence

of five minutes or so, returned, with a purple face and without Mr. Desmond.

“Mr. Desmond says he can’t come, sir.”

A look of astonishment passed among the officers, and Colonel Norreys, for a moment, positively stared at the orderly, as if he could not believe his ears.

“God bless my life and soul, sir!” he thundered, “am I the commanding officer of this regiment or not? *Can’t come!* Upon my word, the service is coming to a pretty pass; an officer *can’t come* when I send for him. Mr. Hills, have the goodness to tell Mr. Desmond to come here immediately? *Can’t come!* Upon my soul!” &c. *ad libitum* until Hills returned, quicker than the orderly had done, but, if anything, slightly more purple about the face, and with eyes steadily bent downwards, and lips tightly compressed.

“Mr. Desmond will be here in a moment, sir,” he said to the irate chief.

“In a moment,” he growled, turning angrily as the door opened to admit the culprit.

“Now, Mr. Desmond—er—why! God bless me —what—*the devil!*—”

His interjeculatory remarks were lost amidst a smothered explosion of laughter from the officers, in which he himself, though he gallantly tried to keep grave, was compelled to join. The only person in

the room who did not laugh was James Desmond. There he stood, in his undress, with his forage-cap stuck jauntily on one side of a perfectly bald head, his long moustache had disappeared, also his short whiskers, hair, eyebrows—it was all as bare as the back of your hand! Yes, there he was, with his great, round, red face, his little pug nose, with one arm akimbo, the other hanging by his side—the personification of “Humpty-Dumpty.”

I have said that the only person in the room who did not laugh was Desmond, but I must make another exception—that one was Carruthers, who put his glass carefully in his eye and surveyed his comrade gravely.

“By—Jove!” he remarked, at length, then dropped his glass and looked at nothing.

“What is the meaning of this, sir?” the chief demanded, making a great effort to keep his countenance.

“You know as much as I do, sir,” Desmond replied, grandiloquently, looking only at his commanding officer, and folding his arms, in which position he looked so supremely absurd that the smothered mirth bubbled out again.

By a mighty effort Colonel Norreys frowned his officers into silence once more, and turned to the indignant “Waugh.”

“Let me hear about it,” he said, sternly.

“I went to bed, as usual, last night, sir,” he answered, “and this morning, when my servant came in he dropped his can of water and rushed out of the room. I thought that perhaps he might be ill, but when I got up and looked in the glass—I perceived the cause.”

“And you mean to tell me that such a change could be brought about without your having *some* idea of what was going on?”

“I do, sir.”

“Humph!” Colonel Norreys’s face was a very expressive one, and he looked more than sceptical on the point. “You say you went to bed as usual last evening?”

“As usual,” returned Desmond.

“Humph! Well, gentlemen, you are all subject to suspicion in this affair. I must ask you if you considered Mr. Desmond ‘as usual’ when he retired from the mess-room?”

“Mr. Desmond,” answered Carruthers, calmly, “was considerably the worse for champagne when he left the mess-room last evening.”

“Ah!” muttered the chief, comprehensively, “does that mean that he was drunk?”

“*Vewy--dwunk*,” returned Carruthers.

“Ah!” remarked the chief again, if possible with

more comprehension than before. "Mr. Paget," addressing a notorious practical joker, "may I ask why you are laughing?"

Paget pulled himself up and straightened his face, without making any reply.

"This is a very serious matter," said the colonel, gravely, whereupon Desmond gave a malignant leer at his brother officers. "Mr. Desmond goes to bed, very drunk and gets up in the morning minus his *hair*. Either he has done it himself, or the blame rests with one or more of you."

A murmur of denial ran along the line, only Carruthers put his handsome nose two inches higher, without condescending to speak.

"You hear, Mr. Desmond," said the colonel, coldly. "This is not the first time I have had to speak to you about playing pranks with your personal appearance. However, since your experiment this time has failed as signally as did a previous one, I will give you a couple of months' leave, and request you to return to your duty a less conspicuous object than you appear at present. You are excused all duty to-day."

Surely that was the most cruel part of it all. Some ten years before "Waugh" had been intensely desirous of possessing a moustache, and since Dame Nature considered him too young to have the

coveted adornment, he had denounced her for an old-fashioned stupid, and foregathered with the regimental surgeon, who told him, in strict confidence, that he had a recipe which would bring out a pair of moustaches with the rapidity of lightning.

“It will sting a bit, but you musn’t mind that,” said the surgeon, gravely.

“Waugh” was heroic. Bless you, he didn’t mind a little mere pain. What would that be in comparison to the delight of having a pair of moustaches of his very own?

Reader, do you know what a cantharides blister is? Well, that was what Dr. Hale gave “Waugh” to bring out his moustaches! It didn’t hurt him at first, and he put it neatly along his upper lip, with a little defiant twirl at either end, to make him look fierce—but he didn’t look fierce very long: the blister did that part of the business. In vain did “Waugh” writhe and tug; he couldn’t move it. It held on to his unfortunate upper lip like grim death or a leech, until eventually the epidermis thought the discussion not worth going on with, so bade a friendly adieu to the *cutis vera* and set off on his travels with the blister. That was bad enough, but the roars of laughter which greeted him when he appeared at breakfast the next morning, with a clearly defined raw patch, just the shape of a

moustache, extending along his upper lip and perfectly correct in detail, even to the knowing little twirl at either extremity, they were much worse.

And to have that raked up now, and made an excuse to let the real culprits off, Desmond felt and said, in no measured terms, that it was disgraceful—utterly disgraceful!

But it was no use attempting to argue the point with the colonel, so he took himself off on his leave in dignified silence and—a wig, returning at the expiration of it, looking all the better for his mysterious shave, for his hair, which before had been persistently straight, grew curly, and really improved his appearance immensely.

And thus, though he did not go to the fancy ball in any character, life, so far as he was concerned, was a perpetual fancy ball; for as long as he remained in the regiment he was never allowed to forget how he had once appeared in the character of “Humpty-Dumpty.” And—he never got drunk again as long as he lived.



A REGIMENTAL AUTOCRAT.

WHO was he? Why, the colonel, of course! What other man in that big family of over-grown children occupies the proud position of absolute monarchy? And what was his name? Thomas Crêvecœur.

He was an autocrat—an absolute monarch—a martinet of the fiercest and most unreasonable description, and he commanded the gallant regiment known as the 18th (Royal) Dragoons. Behind his back they called him “Tommy,” “Our old man,” “Old Fireworks,” and the like; but to his face it was “yes, colonel,” and “no, colonel,” in the most mealy-mouthed manner.

Occasionally the youngsters played very judicious pranks on him; that is to say, when “Tommy” got three sheets in the wind he was wont to unbend considerably, and they therefore had to fall in with his humour, and if he joked—joke back again; but it was unsatisfactory work—so akin to playing with lighted matches over an open barrel of gunpowder.

Well, one evening, after an extra big night, Colonel Crêvecœur retired to his rooms, rather

nearer to being half-seas-over than was usual even with him, who could stow away a bottle of cognac a-day with ease and comfort. He was desperately sleepy—almost too sleepy to walk at all ; the night was awfully cold ; on the ground outside the snow lay thick, and the fires in his rooms burnt brilliantly—as fires do in frosty weather—casting mellow pleasant glow over everything. Up to the sitting-room fire-place Colonel Crêvecœur went, meandering thereto in graceful curves, which so delighted him, that he unburdened his soul by a burst of language, popularly called “choice Italian.” And, somehow, his legs seemed more inclined to continue the graceful meandering movements than the rest of him did, so he caught at the chimney-piece to steady himself ; a liberty which—as it was merely a sham shelf of wood and fringe, put to hide the hideous regulation finish to the hideous regulation grate—that article promptly resented by breaking down, with all its freight of letters, horse-shoes, candlesticks, photograph frames, and odd little Indian ornaments and figures. Happily the glass was safely screwed to the wall, and the fire happening to flicker up just then into a brilliant blaze, Colonel Crêvecœur caught sight of his own handsome countenance, and suddenly became aware that he had been having too much.

“ What a demmed red face you’ve got, Crêvecœur, my boy,” he remarked confidentially, gazing idiotically at the reflection of cheeks flushed scarlet, white moustaches, fiercely waxed, and close-cropped white hair, all rumpled up on end.

“ Been having too much—very wrong—shouldn’t do it—bad example to set the young ‘uns—gerrabed—gerrabed—sooner the better.”

Now since a roaring fire was alight in each of the rooms, the use of a candle was entirely superfluous; but Colonel Crêvecœur, being in as great a state of absent-mindedness as was ever Sir Isaak Newton when he made the little hole for the kitten—though, to be sure, the cause was a very different one—troubled himself to stoop for a candle and stick from among the *débris* on the floor. He fished up the stick first; then the candle. But, alas! the candle was broken, and being slightly too small for the candlestick, required fitting to a greater nicety than his head was capable at that moment of conceiving or his fingers of carrying out.

“ Dem the candlestick!” said Colonel Crêvecœur, flinging it across the room.

Still it did not occur to him to betake himself to bed without any extra light; stooping, he placed the broken candle between the bars, with the effect

of making a big blaze in the fire, but none where he wanted it—at the end of the candle.

“Dem the candle!” he exclaimed, tossing it into the fire; then sat himself down to recover his breath—his eyes closed, and in two minutes he was off to sleep as sound as a church.

He must have slept for about a couple of hours; for he awoke, with a start, to find the fire burned very low in the grate, the room in darkness, and the big clock in the gate tower striking three.

Colonel Crèvecoeur sat up in his chair, as sober as a judge. “I must have been asleep,” he muttered; “gad; how deuced cold it is.”

As he passed the window to go into the next room, he drew aside the curtain to look at the night. The square was as light as day—on the great expanse of newly-fallen snow the full moon shone down bravely, bringing each sentry-box and each snow-capped range of troop-rooms into view, with the startling distinctness of a photograph.

He only stood there for a moment, but, as ill-luck would have it, a man in plain clothes came quietly out from between the chief block of officers’ quarters and the commanding officer’s house, and passed quickly towards the nearest troop-room—*unchallenged* by the sentry immediately below Colonel Crèvecoeur’s window. He did what, of course, any

other commanding officer in the service would have done, he flung up his window, and demanded angrily the reason of the non-challenge?

"I didn't hear him, sir," stammered the unfortunate sentry in dismay.

"You—didn't—hear—him," in tones of the most withering scorn, "and what the devil did you mean by *not* hearing him, sir? What are you there for, sir? Who is he? What is he doing out, prowling about at this time of night? Up to no good, I'll be bound. I'll not have men prowling about at all hours."

The man in plain clothes had quickly enough vanished at the first sound of the colonel's voice, but the old autocrat was not going to be done in that fashion. It was just the time for relieving guard, and whilst he was yet speaking, the corporal of the guard made his appearance, and performed that ceremony.

"Put this man under arrest!" thundered the autocrat, "and turn the guard out."

So there was a scurry back to the guard-room, a hoarse "Guar-r-r-r-r-d tur-r-r-r-n out," a great scramble and scuffling and catching up of carbines plainly audible across the silent square—then a tramp of spurred heels, as the guard marched down to the commanding-officer's quarters.

“Sound *réveillé!*!” shouted the colonel.

Out rang the trumpets and out came the regiment, wondering if a big riot was on, or a monster fire, or maybe an invasion. But, after all, it was but a great to-do about nothing! Who had been out in the square during the past half-hour?

The delinquent stood out instanter. “Me, sir,” he announced without any circumlocution whatever.

“Oh, *you!*” with a frightful sneer on his handsome old face; “and, pray, what were you doing out of your quarters at this hour?”

“I’m Mr. Bartholomew’s servant, sir,” the man explained; “I’ve been helping Dr. Scott to put ‘ot flannins on ‘im, but when he dropped orf to sleep the doctor said I might as well go to bed, as he could do werry well by his-self for the rest of the night.”

Now as young Bartholomew was suffering from a severe attack of inflammation of the lungs, there was nothing further to be said—therefore, with a very bad word, the old colonel banged down his window, not even condescending to dismiss the guard, and whilst the orderly-officer was hesitating whether to take that responsibility upon himself, one of the men broke into a hearty laugh.

Up went the window again!

“Ah, ah! my fine fellow, I’ll teach you to laugh on the other side of your mouth!” the colonel roared. “Mr. Mordaunt—let the regiment be ready in full marching order in half-an-hour.”

Full marching order—at three in the morning, with the thermometer at ten degrees below zero, and snow a foot deep on the ground! In two minutes that barracks might, with reason, have been likened to Pandemonium: such a cursing, such a swearing, in truth, in the space of five short minutes you might have heard as great a variety of oaths as would have served to fill this volume; such a hasty blacking of boots—such a polishing of helmets—such groanings over soiled gloves and facings, which there was no time to clean—such a hurrying, such a scampering of orderlies to apprise the married officers living in the town—such a rousing of whole streets to find the married men living out of barracks—such a grooming and stamping and kicking of sleeping frightened horses—such a plunging and slipping and neighing, until, at last, they were ready to start.

All through the town! Such a flinging up of windows—such thrusting out of sleepy heads to know if an enemy had suddenly invaded the

country—such wonder as the loud strains of “Auld Lang Syne” and “The girl I leave behind me” rang out upon the frosty air—such bitter tears of sweet little modest maidens, who did not like to appear *en demie toilette*, and made sure the brave 18th were off to India at least—such hurried mental totting up of unpaid bills!

Then out into the country! Rousing the inhabitants of village after village, and making them wonder if the Queen was dead, that the soldiers made so much fuss? One—two—three—four—five—six—seven long slippery, dismal, miserable miles by a round which brought them back through the town again, where the worst was to come. A good mile from the town clouds quickly drifted across the moon, and the snow began to fall again in heavy blinding wreaths; several horses suddenly became utterly unmanageable and frantic, lashing out every minute when they were not stumbling, and stumbling when they were not occupied in kicking—one fell, breaking his rider’s leg in two places, in the fall; a second came down, a couple of hundred yards further on, smashing a fore-leg horribly; a third ran his head bang against a lamp-post, tumbling over as dead as a door nail, at which another terrified animal made a clean bolt of it and tried to

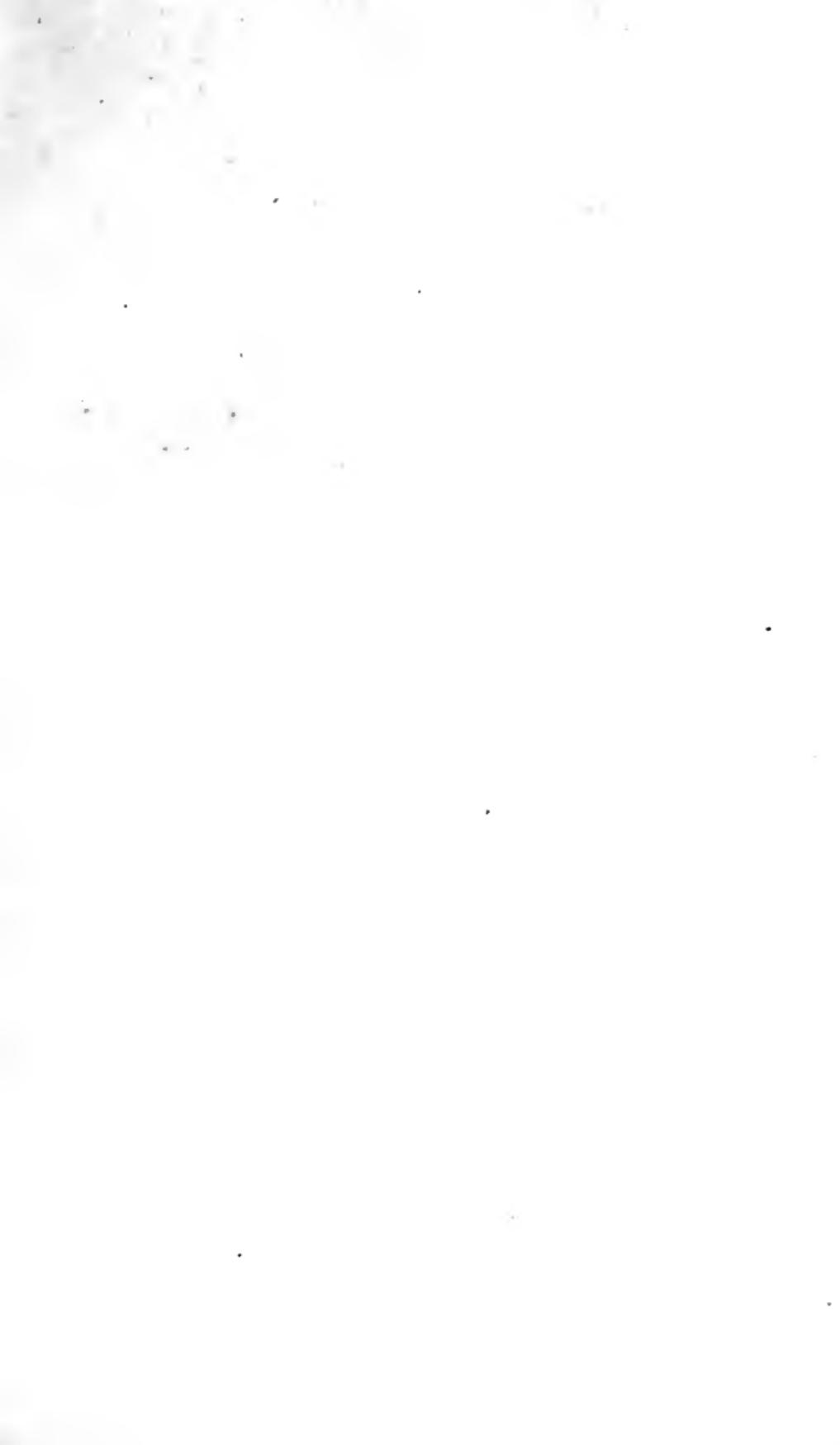
jump a house, with the result of turning a somersault and landing in the gutter with a broken back, jerking his rider off, with, happily, no more serious injury than a couple of broken ribs.

It was a ghastly night's work, and truly morning light rose upon a ghastly sight. Three gallant chargers lay stretched stiff and stark upon the trampled blood-stained road; two hospital cots were filled that before had been empty; anger and disgust was on every face, well-nigh rebellion and mutiny in every heart!

Amongst it all Colonel Crêvecœur stalked, grim, silent, vigilant, like an avenging spirit—a mighty big spirit for such a very trivial a misdemeanour.

In due course the story was wafted to headquarters, with what effect never transpired. The dignity and the authority of a commanding-officer must be kept up of course—yet many in the regiment suspected that when, not many weeks later, Major Forde was gazetted to the command of the regiment, *vice* Thomas Crêvecœur, resigned, the retirement had been politely compulsory.

So he passed out of the regiment which he had ruled so long with a rod of iron, and with him—with one exception—passed away the last of the old race of martinets.





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2 miles

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